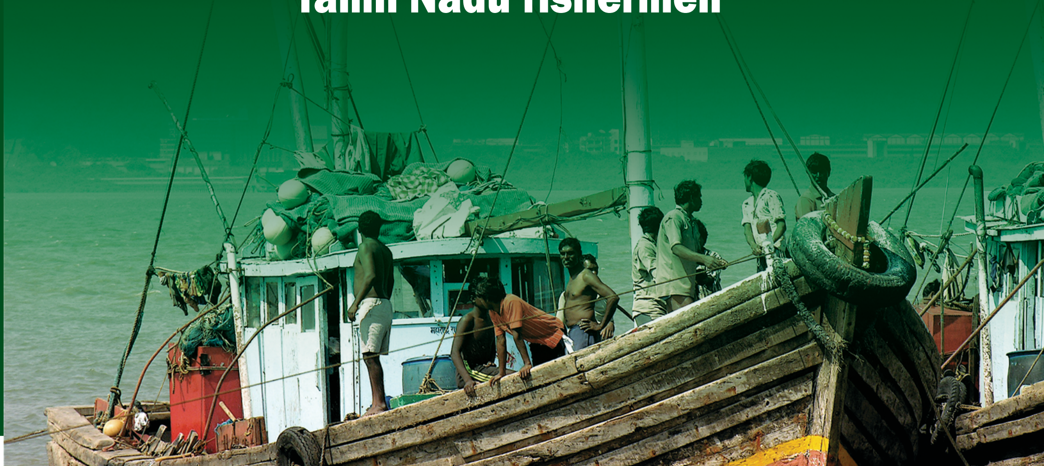
# A compilation of letters addressed by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India to resolve the livelihood issues of Tamil Nadu fishermen



# A compilation of letters addressed by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India to resolve the livelihood issues of Tamil Nadu fishermen

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# ‘Act to release fishermen arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy’

## D.O. letter dated 07.06.2011

I would like to bring to your attention a recent incident of arrest of 4 Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Police. The following four fishermen of Rameswaram Island 1) Thiru Jayakumar, 2) Thiru Prabhat, 3) Thiru Sundar and 4) Thiru Marimuthu went fishing in a mechanized boat bearing Registration No.TN/12/MFB/252 from Rameswaram base on 1.6.2011 and were expected back on shore on 2.6.2011.

On 2.6.2011, when the fishermen were out at sea, sudden inclement weather and heavy winds resulted in the destruction of their boat. The above four fishermen of the capsized boat swam for about 8 hours through mid-sea and landed on the coast of Nainatheevu of Sri Lanka. They surrendered before the army check post, and were handed over to the Kayts Police on

3-6-2011. They were then, produced before the Kayts Court on 6.6.2011 and were remanded to Police custody till 17.6.2011.

The families of the arrested four fishermen and various Fishermen Associations in the Rameswaram area have appealed to the Government of Tamil Nadu for early release of these apprehended fishermen. The Government of Tamil Nadu is also in constant touch with the officials of the Sri Lankan High Commission for arranging their early release.

I would like to seek your kind intervention in the issue and request you to ensure that the Government of Sri Lanka releases the above apprehended fishermen without further delay.

The Government of Tamil Nadu and the fishermen will be grateful if these members are released immediately as a gesture of goodwill by the Sri Lankan Government, who have already assured in various bilateral meetings that the Indian fishermen who inadvertently stray into Sri Lankan waters will be released expeditiously without prolonged legal hurdles.

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## Condemning frequent incidents of arrest and detention of Tamil Nadu fishermen

### D.O. letter dated 21.06.2011

It has been brought to my notice that 23 fishermen of Tamil Nadu who accidentally strayed into Sri Lankan waters while fishing were taken into custody by the Sri Lankan Navy and taken to Thalaimannar Police Station yesterday (20.6.2011) afternoon.

After my Government took charge in May, 2011, 4 fishermen whose boat had capsized were arrested and remanded to custody by Kayts Court in Sri Lanka. I had written to you about this on 7th June, 2011. In your letter dated 15th June, 2011, you had informed me that the matter had been taken up with the Sri Lankan Government. These fishermen were released on 17th June, 2011, and I thank you for your kind intervention in this regard.

I wish to reiterate that the frequent incidents of arrest and detention of Tamil Nadu fishermen crossing

the International Maritime Boundary Line which is very close to the shore off Rameswaram in the Palk Bay area, is worrisome. This also creates a lot of tension and unrest among the fishermen in Tamil Nadu. I had discussed this vexatious issue when I called on you at New Delhi on 14.6.2011. I also discussed this issue with Shri Shivshankar Menon, National Security Advisor, on two occasions, once when he called on me before leaving for Colombo on 9th June, 2011, and again during our discussions on 14.6.2011.

I am distressed to note that the Sri Lankan Navy has again taken into custody 23 fishermen along with 5 boats because they strayed accidentally into Sri Lankan waters. I seek your kind intervention in this issue and request you to ensure that the Sri Lankan Government releases the 23 fishermen taken into custody immediately.

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# Central intervention sought in Sri Lankan attack

## D.O. letter dated 10.10.2011

I would like to bring to your attention, various incidents of attacks and harassment of fishermen of Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy and Sri Lankan miscreants while fishing in the Palk Bay area, which is a matter of great concern to the Government of Tamil Nadu. As you are aware, the fishermen of Tamil Nadu have, from time immemorial, been fishing in the Palk Bay area in order to earn their livelihood. This Government accords the highest priority to protecting the fishing rights of its fishermen and ensuring their safety.

I wish to inform you with deep anguish that since this Government took charge in May, 2011, there have been as many as 16 incidents of attacks / harassment

and apprehension of Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Authorities. Four fishermen of Rameswaram were apprehended on 7.6.2011 by the Sri Lankan Authorities and they were released on 17.6.2011 only after the matter was brought by me to your kind notice through my D.O.Letter. Subsequently, again on 20.6.2011, 23 fishermen fishing in 5 boats were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Authorities. Again, I had to bring this to your kind attention through my letter dated 21.6.2011 in order to seek their release.

There is a uniform pattern of either the personnel of the Sri Lankan Navy harassing / attacking the fishermen of Tamil Nadu fishing in the Palk Bay area or miscreants from Sri Lanka committing such acts. A number of Indian fishermen have been injured in such attacks and there have been a number of instances of theft of their fish catch, damage to their fishing nets and snatching away of the personal belongings of the fishermen.

The Indian fishermen, especially belonging to Nagapattinam and Ramanathapuram Districts of Tamil Nadu, venture out to sea for fishing only with the constant fear of being attacked by the Sri Lankan Navy / Miscreants.

The Foreign Secretary, Government of India, Shri Ranjan Mathai called on me at Chennai on 8.10.2011.

I brought the various incidents of attacks and harassment to his notice and requested him to take up the above issues with the Government of Sri Lanka who, on the one hand were participating in various Indo-Sri Lankan Meetings in order to resolve the fishermen's problems and on the other were resorting to violence against our fishermen.

However, it is distressing to note that on the same day, i.e., on the evening of 8.10.2011, even before the Foreign Secretary reached Colombo, the Sri Lankan Navy again chased away our fishermen in the sea by firing in the air, off Mandapam coast of Ramanathapuram District and this incident has been widely reported in the print and electronic media.

I request your kind intervention in this issue of grave concern and request the Government of India to convey its serious objection to the Sri Lankan Government with regard to the continuous incidents of harassment and attacks on the fishermen of Tamil Nadu who seek to eke out their living peacefully in their traditional areas of fishing in the Palk Bay area. I would also like to emphasize that the harassment of the fishermen of Tamil Nadu should be viewed as an act of provocation and aggression against India by Sri Lanka, similar to acts of firing across the

borders of India by neighbours such as Pakistan and China. The attack on the fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu should be viewed as a national issue and not as an isolated problem of Tamil Nadu alone.

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# ‘View Sri Lankan attacks on Tamil Nadu fishermen as a National issue’

## D.O. letter dated 07.11.2011

I am writing this letter with a deep sense of concern about the safety and well being of the fishermen of Tamil Nadu, who are now being attacked almost on a daily basis by the Sri Lankan Navy / miscreants, while they pursue their traditional occupation of fishing in the Palk Bay area. I have already brought to your attention on 10.10.2011 my deep anguish over the fact that, since this Government took charge in May, 2011, there have been a large number of incidents of attacks / harassment and apprehension of Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Authorities. I had also personally apprised the Foreign Secretary, Government of India, Shri Ranjan Mathai on 8.10.2011 at Chennai about the continuous incidents of attacks on and harassment of Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy / miscreants.

In your letter dated 3.11.2011, you have been kind enough to inform me that you had expressed your deep concern over the incidents of attacks on the Indian (Tamil Nadu) fishermen to the President of Sri Lanka during your meeting with him at New York in September, 2011. You had also mentioned that the Sri Lankan side had 'promised to seriously investigate these incidents'. While thanking you for also reiterating that the welfare, safety and security of our fishermen have always received the highest priority of the Government, I am constrained to point out that all the concerns of the Government of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu in this regard have only fallen on deaf ears where the Sri Lankan Authorities are concerned. So far, since May, 2011, there have been over 22 incidents of attacks / harassments and apprehension of Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Authorities. The irony is that even after my letter to you on 10.10.2011, there have been at least 6 more major incidents in which the Tamil Nadu fishermen have been blatantly attacked, harassed and injured.

On 4.11.2011, there was an incident in which naval personnel in a Sri Lankan Naval ship came near a mechanized boat off the coast of Kodiakarai of Nagapattinam District, cut the ropes of the nets of the fishermen and threw stones at the boat, in which one fisherman sustained severe head injuries. Likewise on 5.11.2011, Sri Lankan Navy personnel attacked a mechanized fishing boat off Rameswaram base near Katchatheevu and the boat driver sustained serious injuries and had to be admitted in a hospital.

May I also point out that there seems to be a definite pattern of attacks by the Sri Lankan Navy / miscreants to create a fear psychosis amongst the innocent Tamil Nadu fishermen with a view to forcing them to desist from eking out their livelihood in their traditional areas of fishing in the Palk Bay area? There is a deep feeling of unrest and concern among the fishermen community in particular and the entire State in general due to such incidents that have not stopped despite our repeated appeals to the Government of India and the diplomatic efforts of the Government of India.

I request you to kindly take a strong stand against the Government of Sri Lanka with regard to such attacks

on our fishermen and convey your serious apprehension through tough words and action, since as already stated by me on 10.10.2011, the attacks should be viewed as a National issue and not as an isolated problem of Tamil Nadu alone.

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## Centre should assert itself to contain rogue elements in Sri Lankan Navy

### D.O. letter dated 16.11.2011

Kindly refer to my letters dated 7.6.2011, 21.6.2011, 10.10.2011 and 7.11.2011, in which I have brought to your attention various incidents of apprehension, as well as attacks on and harassment of the fishermen of Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy, which has caused great unrest amongst the people of Tamil Nadu. I had also requested you to treat the attacks on fishermen as a National issue since such attacks should be construed as attacks on India.

I further wish to inform you with a deep sense of agony that, despite my letters to you and despite your taking up the issue with the Government of Sri Lanka and their stated assurances in this regard, the attacks on our fishermen continue unabated and the situation is worsening day by day.

In the latest incident which occurred on 15.11.2011, a fisherman of Rameswaram was seriously injured when Indian fishing boats were attacked, allegedly by the Sri Lankan Navy personnel, near the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) off Kachatheevu. It has been reported that as many as 15 Sri Lankan Navy men came in a high-speed patrolling vessel and pelted stones on the Tamil Nadu fishermen, which resulted in a severe head injury to one fisherman, Mr. Selvaraj. He started bleeding profusely and was brought ashore with the help of his fellow fishermen and thereafter admitted to hospital for treatment.

The above incident has been flashed widely in the media, creating a lot of unrest among the fishermen of Rameswaram who venture into the sea braving all odds to eke out their livelihood in the sea. The continued occurrences of such incidents of attack has also created a feeling of insecurity among the fishermen community and despair over the apparent inaction of the Government of India to prevent such attacks despite our repeated requests.

I have already shared my apprehension of the double standards adopted by the Government of Sri Lanka, which, while issuing statements on the need for treating

the straying fishermen on a humanitarian basis, continues to be silent on the attacks launched by its own Navy.

I strongly feel that the Government of India should assert itself with the Sri Lankan Government to control the rogue elements in the Sri Lankan Navy who continue to indulge in acts of physical assault on our innocent fishermen who, for several generations, are engaged in fishing solely for their livelihood in the Palk Bay area.

I solicit your urgent action in this regard.

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# Indian Coast Guard's outrageous stand on Tamil Nadu fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 26.11.2011

I wish to bring to your notice that, in a Public Interest Litigation under W.P.No.4190/2011 filed before the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court for directing the Indian Coast Guard to give protection to the Indian (Tamil Nadu) fishermen who conduct fishing for their livelihood in the Palk Bay waters, the Indian Coast Guard in its Counter Affidavit filed before the Court, has contended that Tamil Nadu fishermen cross the IMBL, conduct fishing in Sri Lankan waters by poaching and are using nets banned in that country. It has also been suggested by the Indian Coast Guard in their Counter Affidavit that Tamil Nadu should proclaim a 'No Fishing Zone' within 5 Nautical Miles (NM) distance from the Indo-Sri Lankan International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and impose strict punitive measures against the defaulters.

While expressing my total disagreement with this illogical, preposterous and absolutely outrageous stand taken by the Indian Coast Guard before a Court of Law, I wish to remind you of the stand of my Government on this issue as elucidated in the Memorandum handed over to you by me in New Delhi on 14-6-2011.

To recapitulate, from time immemorial, the fishermen of Tamil Nadu have been traditionally fishing in the waters of the Palk Bay without any geographical or political boundaries. I understand that the issue of allowing fishing in each other's waters on a mutually agreed basis is being discussed by the Joint Working Group (JWG) involving Indian and Sri Lankan Authorities. That being the case, it is really surprising that the Indian Coast Guard has taken such a blatantly condemnable stand. If this stand is implemented, it will mean that the Tamil Nadu fishermen have to stop fishing and starve, which I am sure, is not the intention of the Government of India. I, therefore, request you to instruct the concerned authorities to rectify this stand before the concerned Court of Law at the earliest before any irredeemable damage is done.

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# Restore the rights of Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait

**D.O. letter dated 17.03.2012**

I would like to bring to your kind attention, yet another incident of harassment of Tamil Nadu (Rameswaram) fishermen by Sri Lankan fishermen that occurred on 14.3.2012. Four fishermen of Rameswaram ventured into the sea for fishing in a mechanized fishing boat bearing registration No.TN/10/MFB/604 from Rameswaram fishing base on 14.3.2012 in their traditional fishing areas of the Palk Bay waters. Some Sri Lankan miscreants hurled petrol bombs on their boat. As a result, the boat of the Tamil Nadu fishermen sank in the sea. The four fishermen were rescued by another boat bearing registration No.TN/10/MFB/641, fishing in the nearby vicinity, and brought to shore on 15.3.2012 morning.

In this context, I wish to inform you that the incidents of harassment of Tamil Nadu fishermen continue unabated

despite the assurances given by the Government of Sri Lanka, that Tamil Nadu fishermen will not be harassed. Many a time, Tamil Nadu fishermen who are harassed by Sri Lankan Navy/miscreants, do not even come forward to lodge a complaint, fearing a backlash from the Sri Lankan Navy.

The continued occurrence of the incidents of harassment also proves that the Government of Sri Lanka has not taken serious measures to curb the incidents of violence against Tamil Nadu fishermen. Sri Lankan miscreants watching the Indian (Tamil Nadu) fishermen being blatantly harassed by the Sri Lankan Naval personnel, get emboldened to attack Tamil Nadu fishermen as was done on 14.3.2012. These recurring attacks confirm my earlier statement that the Sri Lankan Government is adopting double standards with regard to fishermen's issues.

I am also deeply pained to point out that the issue of attacks on Tamil Nadu fishermen is not being treated as a National issue. No serious action is initiated whenever such attacks occur. It would not be out of context to further mention that in the recent 4th Joint Working Group Meeting held at Colombo, on 13-14th January 2012, it was reiterated that the highest priority is being accorded

to the well being, safety and security of fishermen by both the countries, and it was agreed that use of force could not be justified under any circumstances. The assurances given remain only on paper and are not being honoured by the Sri Lankan Government. The recent incident of attack proves that all the discussions aimed at ensuring the safety of our fishermen while fishing is an exercise in futility.

I wish to reiterate that the consistent policy of my Government is to restore the fishing rights of the Indian fishermen in their traditional fishing areas in the Palk Bay waters where they have been traditionally fishing from time immemorial. I, therefore, request you to kindly take up the issue with the Sri Lankan Government and its President urgently, and ensure that no such brutal incidents occur in mid-sea again."

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## 'Impress upon the Sri Lankan Government that its Navy must refrain from harassing Indian fishermen'

**D.O. letter dated 27.06.2012**

I would like to bring to your kind attention yet another incident of harassment of fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy on 26.6.2012. About 704 mechanized fishing boats went for fishing in the sea from Rameswaram fishing base on 25.6.2012. Fishermen in 45 boats fishing near Katchatheevu on 26.6.2012, were harassed by the Sri Lankan Navy. The Sri Lankan Navy is reported to have chased the fishermen and cut the ropes and damaged nets of 10 boats resulting in huge loss to the fishermen.

You are aware that I have brought to your kind attention the various incidents of attack on Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy / Miscreants within the past 12 months and sought your intervention. This latest incident of harassment has shocked the State of

Tamil Nadu and created a psychological fear in the minds of our fishermen.

I wish to reiterate that from time immemorial the fishermen of Tamil Nadu have been traditionally fishing in the waters near Katchatheevu, notwithstanding any geographical or political boundaries.

I request you to kindly take up the issue with the Sri Lankan Government and impress upon them the need to instruct their Navy to exercise restraint and refrain from harassing innocent Indian fishermen pursuing their livelihood in their traditional waters.

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# ‘Take up with Sri Lanka issue of immediate release of all arrested fishermen’

## D.O. letter dated 04.07.2012

I invite your kind attention to my letter dated 28.6.2012, wherein I have sought your intervention in preventing the incidents of harassment of Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy. I am deeply pained to bring to your notice two more incidents of apprehension of Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy on 2.7.2012.

One vallam with 3 fishermen went fishing from Mukundarayachathiram fishing base in Rameswaram on 29.6.2012. The above vallam and the crew are reported to have been arrested near Kalpiti Island by the Sri Lankan Navy, alleging transportation of tobacco products. The fishermen and crew were reportedly taken to Neer-Colombo for further enquiry.

In another incident, one mechanized fishing boat with 5 crew members which went fishing from Rameswaram base got grounded in the sea near Katchatheevu. A search boat with 5 crew members was sent to locate and tow the grounded boat back to the fishing base. It has been reported that both the boats with all the 10 crew members onboard have been detained by the Sri Lankan Navy and they have been lodged in a Sri Lankan Jail.

You are aware that already 5 Rameswaram fishermen are languishing in Sri Lankan jails due to a fabricated case since 29.11.2011. The arrest of 13 more Rameswaram fishermen with their 3 boats has further confirmed the unrelenting, harsh attitude of the Sri Lankan Navy towards our Tamil Nadu fishermen who seek to eke out their livelihood by fishing in the traditional Palk Bay waters.

I, therefore, request you to kindly take up the issue with the Sri Lankan Government and arrange for the immediate release of all the fishermen of Rameswaram arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy.

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# A call to stop the training to Sri Lankan armed force in India

**D.O. letter dated 16.07.2012**

You may recall the Resolution passed by the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly in June, 2011, urging the Government of India to take up with the United Nations Organisation the issue of declaring those found guilty of war crimes as war criminals, and also to initiate action by working with other Nations for the imposition of an economic embargo on the Government of Sri Lanka till the Tamils who are now living in camps in Sri Lanka are resettled in their own places and are allowed to live with dignity and with equal Constitutional rights on par with the Sinhalese citizens.

Tamils across the world feel that the sentiments of the Tamils have been trampled on by the Government of India not only by its inaction on this resolution, but also by continuing to give preferential treatment by way

of providing technical training to defence personnel belonging to Sri Lanka.

When nine personnel belonging to the Sri Lankan Air Force were undergoing technical training at the Air Force Station, Tambaram, Tamil Nadu, I had issued a press statement condemning this action of the Government of India and requesting that these Sri Lankan Air Force personnel should be sent back to Sri Lanka. Instead of sending them back to Sri Lanka, the Government of India is now providing training to these personnel at the Yelahenka Air Force Station, Bengaluru.

Again, it has now come to my notice that Air Vice Marshal Jegath Julanga Diaz of the Sri Lankan Air Force and Rear Admiral S. Ranasinghe of the Sri Lankan Navy, who are undergoing training at the National Defence Academy, New Delhi, along with 25 other trainees belonging to various countries have arrived at Coonoor, The Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu, on 15.7.2012 and are visiting the Defence Service Staff College, Wellington, on 16.7.2012 as part of their training programme. Imparting training to personnel belonging to the Sri Lankan Armed Forces in Defence Training Institutions in India and allowing them to visit Tamil Nadu reveals the utter disrespect shown to the sentiments of the people of Tamil Nadu.

The people of Tamil Nadu are frustrated and outraged by this callous and adamant attitude of the Government of India in persistently giving training to personnel belonging to the Sri Lankan Armed Forces in India.

I, therefore, request you to give suitable instructions to the Ministry of Defence to desist from giving any training to personnel belonging to the Sri Lankan Armed Forces anywhere in India and send such personnel back to Sri Lanka immediately.

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# Demanding investigation into the death of Tamilian in Dubai

**D.O. letter dated 17.07.2012**

I wish to bring to your kind attention, an incident of death of a Tamil Nadu fisherman in the Dubai seas, due to shooting by an American US Naval ship on 16.7.2012.

The following fishermen of Ramanathapuram District had gone to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, to work in a fishing boat on contract basis (daily wage basis) for eking out their livelihood and to support their families:

1. Thiru A.Sekhar, aged 25 years
2. Thiru M.Panduvanathan, aged 22 years
3. Thiru K.Muthukannan, aged 32 years
4. Thiru R.Muthumaniraj, aged 27 years

The above fishermen were reported to have been engaged in fishing in a civilian vessel (about 30 feet

long) at a place called Jabel Ali, a frequent docking point for American Naval vessels, about 30 miles south-west of Dubai on 16.7.2012. Reports published in the media reveal that a security team on board the US Naval Ship 'Rappahannock' fired at their fishing boat using a .50-calibre machine gun at about 6.00 PM (IST) on 16.7.2012, after it "disregarded warnings and raced towards the ship".

I am pained to inform you that one of the fishermen A.Sekhar, belonging to Thoppuvalasai village in Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, died due to the above mentioned shooting by the US Naval Ship. The other three fishermen, whose names are mentioned at Sl. Nos: 2,3 & 4 above, sustained bullet injuries and have been admitted in hospital for treatment.

I also wish to bring to your kind notice that, in a similar incident which took place in February, 2012, in the sea off Cochin, 2 fishermen, one belonging to Tamil Nadu viz. Ajeesh Bingo of Kanniyakumari District and another from Kerala were killed due to shooting by the Security Personnel on board an Italian Cargo vessel viz. "ENTRICA LEXIE". Efforts were then made by the Government of India to obtain compensation for the families of the deceased fishermen from the concerned Italian Merchant Ship Company.

I, therefore, request you to kindly take up this matter with the Governments of the United States and Dubai, UAE, to cause a detailed enquiry into the incident. I also request you to ensure that due compensation is paid to the families of the deceased and injured fishermen. The Indian Embassy Officials concerned may kindly be asked to render all necessary medical and other assistance to the injured. As the dead and injured fishermen are innocent fishermen who were conducting fishing in the sea only for their livelihood, please ensure that justice is rendered.

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# Demanding the release of 23 Rameswaram fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 23.07.2012

I wish to bring to your kind notice yet another incident of apprehension of Rameswaram fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy on 22.7.2012 which has occurred for the second time, within a period of 15 days, in the month of July. Five Mechanized fishing boats bearing Registration Nos: TN/10/MFB/228, TN/10/MFB/400, TN/10/MFB/279, TN/10/MFB/863 and TN/10/MFB/273, which went for fishing on 21.7.2012 from Rameswaram base, with 23 fishermen onboard, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy and are at present under custody at Thalaimannar in Sri Lanka, having been remanded for two weeks.

The above fishermen were fishing in the sea off Katchatheevu, in their traditional fishing waters, when

they were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy. As I had already informed you, in my previous letters, the incidents of apprehension and harassment by the Sri Lankan Navy have become a regular occurrence in the past two months, especially after the end of the fishing ban period. The intention of the Sri Lankan Navy to instill fear in the minds of the fishermen and prevent them from conducting fishing in their traditional waters is very obvious from the above incident of apprehension. The above actions of the Sri Lankan Navy have created a feeling of insecurity in the minds of the fishermen, who feel that there is no guarantee for their life and property in the sea, in the prevailing situation.

It would not be out of context to mention that the Sri Lankan Navy temporarily suspends apprehension and harassment activities only at times when diplomatic level meetings are convened between India and Sri Lanka on the fishing issue and resumes such activities immediately thereafter, much to the woe of our fishermen. The fishermen of the districts adjoining Palk Bay, especially from the Rameswaram area, are targeted by the Sri Lankan Navy, making it impossible for the fishermen to conduct fishing

which is the only occupation they know for the sustenance of their families.

I, therefore, request you to kindly arrange for the immediate release of the 23 Rameswaram fishermen with their five boats to Tamil Nadu urgently. Kindly take up this issue with the Sri Lankan Government and request it to instruct its Navy to refrain from arresting fishermen who conduct fishing in their traditional waters only for eking out their livelihood. I also wish to point out that unless the Government of India intervenes in this issue there is every possibility of recurrence of such incidents in the coming months.

I solicit your urgent action in this regard.

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## ‘Put a stop to harassment of Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan Navy’

**D.O. letter dated 20.08.2012**

I wish to bring to your kind notice, a worrisome incident of attack and harassment of innocent Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy on 18th August, 2012. Five Fibre Glass Reinforced Plastic Vallam boats belonging to Vellapallam and Vanavanmadevi fishing villages in Vedaranyam taluk of Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu ventured into the sea for fishing on 17.8.2012 and 18.8.2012 with 18 fishermen on board. When they were fishing in the sea at a depth of 15 fathoms near Vellapallam area on 18.8.2012, the fishermen in the above 5 fishing boats were brutally attacked by Sri Lankan Naval personnel who came to the spot in a boat bearing Number D-146. The Naval personnel, besides attacking the fishermen, seized their ice boxes, food and other fishing implements in the boats and dumped them into the sea. They also cut the nets laid

by the fishermen. Serious injuries were inflicted on one fisherman, Thiru Kuppusamy, S/o Ramiah, with a knife on his right wrist, in addition to 7 other fishermen who sustained minor injuries due to assault with rubber rods. All the injured fishermen were given medical treatment in the Government Hospital at Nagapattinam on their return to the shore on 19.8.2012.

This incident is yet another instance of the high handedness of Sri Lankan Naval personnel who keep on targeting the poor and innocent fishermen of Tamil Nadu while they try to eke out their livelihood through fishing. I am distressed to once again have to point out that the incidents of harassment of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy simply continue unabated. I had already informed you in my letter dated 23.7.2012 that, unless the Government of India intervenes in this issue, there is every possibility of recurrence of such incidents in the coming months and this incident reinforces our apprehension.

The Sri Lankan Navy, emboldened by the soft handling of the issue by the Government of India, is attacking/ harassing the fishermen of Tamil Nadu with impunity. The statements at diplomatic level meetings of the two countries stating that "the use of force on fishermen cannot

be justified by any means” remain only on paper and are honoured more in the breach by the Sri Lankan Navy, who seem to be making a mockery of the entire diplomatic process.

I, therefore, request you to kindly take up this issue strongly with the Sri Lankan Government and ensure that the Sri Lankan Navy strictly refrains from harassing Indian fishermen who conduct fishing in their traditional waters for their subsistence and ensure that such incidents do not occur in future.

I solicit your urgent action.

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# ‘Take up with Sri Lankan Authorities the issue of release of Indian fishermen’

**D.O. letter dated 04.03.2013**

I wish to inform you that 16 fishermen from Thoothukudi District of Tamil Nadu, who were engaged in fishing in the Gulf of Mannar in 3 mechanized fishing boats bearing Registration Numbers TN/12/MFB/429, TN/12/MFB/431 and TN/12/MFB/003, are reported to have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 3.3.2013. The fishing boats and fishermen were reportedly taken to Kalpitiya Police Station for further investigation and it is learnt that they have been produced in Court.

I am pained to point out that the incidents of apprehension and harassment of innocent Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy have become a regular occurrence

in the past few months creating a feeling of insecurity and fear amongst the fishermen community.

The families of the arrested 16 fishermen and various Fishermen Associations have appealed to the Government of Tamil Nadu to secure the early release of these apprehended fishermen since they were only pursuing their livelihood in the Gulf of Mannar area, where they have been fishing all along. The Sri Lankan Government has always assured us in various bilateral meetings that Indian fishermen who are apprehended while fishing will be released expeditiously without prolonged legal hurdles.

I, therefore, request you to kindly urge the Sri Lankan authorities to immediately release the 16 fishermen with their 3 boats without filing any cases against them.

I solicit your urgent action in this regard.

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# Demand for intervention to stop in harassment of Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan Navy

**D.O. letter dated 14.03.2013**

It has been brought to my notice that 9 Mechanized Fishing Boats of Tamil Nadu with 53 fishermen onboard, which ventured into the sea for fishing on 13-3-2013 from Rameswaram fishing base, were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy and taken to Thalaimannar and Delft Island, and are now being kept in their custody. This incident of apprehension is another instance of the increasing intolerance of the Sri Lankan Navy towards the hapless fishermen of the Palk Bay area of Tamil Nadu who have no other alternative but to fish in the narrow Palk Bay fishing grounds that are further restricted by the unilateral drawal of the International Maritime Boundary Line, drawn without the consent of the Government of Tamil Nadu or its fishermen.

You will agree with me that solutions to the fishing disputes between two neighbouring countries are not resolved by force or by treating the fishermen of the neighbouring country as ‘criminals’ and arresting and terrorizing them through assaults and gun firing. However, the increasing belligerence of Sri Lanka in the recent past towards the Indian fishing boats fishing in their traditional fishing areas, as exhibited by a spurt of arrests and violence, is a worrisome trend.

The Government of Tamil Nadu, under my leadership, has challenged the issue of unilateral drawal of the IMBL leading to the ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka before the Hon’ble Supreme Court. We are agitated by incidents of repeated capture of our fishermen while pursuing their livelihood. We expect the Government of India to also respond and react pro-actively when incidents of this nature happen. Let Sri Lanka not be emboldened by your silence and construe it as a sign of weakness and indifference towards our fishermen.

I request you to urgently summon the High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in New Delhi and lodge the Government of India’s strong protest against the continuing

arrests and incidents of violence against the fishermen of Tamil Nadu, including the recent incident of firing on an innocent fisherman. I also request you to advise the Sri Lankan Government to release the arrested fishermen of Rameshwaram without foisting any criminal cases and desist from future provocations through needless arrests and acts of violence.

I once again wish to convey my strong disapproval of the high handed attitude of Sri Lanka and seek your urgent intervention in this regard.

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# Demanding a permanent solution to the harassment of Tamil Nadu fishermen by Sri Lankan Navy

## D.O. letter dated 06.06.2013

I wish to draw your attention to yet another outrageous incident of capture and arrest of 49 innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu who ventured out in 10 mechanised boats on 5.6.2013 for eking out their livelihood on the high seas. It is reported that 24 fishermen belonging to Rameswaram set out in 5 boats and they have been illegally abducted by the Sri Lankan Navy and taken away to Mannar in Sri Lanka where they are being held in custody. Further, another batch of 5 boats from Rameswaram with 25 fishermen on board have been captured in the high seas and detained by the Sri Lankan Navy at Kayts Island. Further, it was also shocking to learn that one boat, TN 10/MFB/1004 which was chased away ruthlessly by the Sri Lankan Navy actually capsized and five fishermen on

board were rescued by their fellow fishermen and reached our shores safely.

I have repeatedly written to you about the travails of innocent Tamil Nadu fishermen who face harassment, abduction and assault at the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy, which continues with its menacing and predatory acts in the face of pusillanimous responses and apathy by the Government of India. Things have come to such a pass that fishermen from Tamil Nadu are unable to access their traditional fishing waters for fear of being kidnapped or attacked by the Sri Lankan Navy. The entire fishermen community in Tamil Nadu is agitated, incensed and in a volatile mood.

Despite my repeated protests, the Government of India has taken no firm stance in the matter and has exerted little or no diplomatic pressure on Sri Lanka to bring about a permanent solution to the problem of harassment and arrests of innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu.

I request you to instruct the Ministry of External Affairs to immediately summon the High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in New Delhi and lodge the Government of India's strong protest against this latest act of illegal and highhanded abduction of such a large number of innocent

fishermen in the Palk Bay by the Sri Lankan Navy. The Government of India should convey in no uncertain terms its indignation at this latest act of abduction of innocent Indian fishermen and ensure that the Sri Lankan Navy is restrained from making such unprovoked assaults on innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu.

May I also request you to firmly instruct our diplomats in Colombo to immediately take up the matter with the Government of Sri Lanka and secure the immediate release of the 49 fishermen and their boats?

I solicit your immediate action in the matter.

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# Request to stop arrest of Tamil Nadu fishermen in Palk Strait

**D.O. letter dated 06.08.2013**

I would like to invite your attention to my earlier letters dated 17.6.2013, 8.7.2013, 1.8.2013 and 2.8.2013 highlighting the plight of 70 innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu who continue to languish in Sri Lankan jails. I had also sought your personal intervention at the highest diplomatic levels in order to secure their immediate release. In the absence of any action by the Government of India to secure their release by raising the issue with the Sri Lankan Government, these poor fishermen from Tamil Nadu still remain in Sri Lankan custody.

Even while they continue to remain in Sri Lankan jails, in yet another outrageous incident that took place on 3rd

August 2013, another 20 fishermen from Rameshwaram have again been abducted by the Sri Lankan Navy. This is the third time within a period of one month that fishermen from Tamil Nadu have been subjected to such highhanded acts of abduction and kidnapping at the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy. 5 Mechanised fishing boats bearing registration numbers IND/TN/10/MM/268, IND/TN/10/MM/865, IND/TN/10/MM/381, IND/TN/10/MM/708, IND/TN/11/ MM/325, which ventured out for fishing on 3.8.2013 from Rameshwaram base with 20 fishermen on board, have been apprehended near Katchatheevu by the Sri Lankan Navy and taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka. They have been remanded to custody on 4.8.2013.

I have been repeatedly writing to you about the travails of innocent Tamil Nadu fishermen who face harassment, abduction, assault and apprehension at the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy, which continues its menacing and predatory acts in the face of the immobility and apathy of the Government of India to the plight of these innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu. The ineffective response of

the Government of India has emboldened the Sri Lankan Navy to continue such predatory attacks on Indian fishermen with impunity.

I must also emphasise that these frequent abductions, arrests and detention for long periods of time of Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Government, have created tension and agitation amongst the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu. The fishermen community in Tamil Nadu, which faces continuous harassment not only by the Sri Lankan Navy but also attacks by Sri Lankan miscreants in the guise of fishermen, now nurses a strong grievance against the Government of India that it has forsaken them in a time of crisis and is apathetic to their interests.

These continuous attacks and abductions are acts of an unfriendly nation and should be countered effectively by coercive diplomacy. A strong message should be delivered through diplomatic channels that India will not tolerate these attacks. Our diplomats in Colombo should take up the matter with the Government of Sri Lanka and take concrete steps to secure the immediate release of all the 90 fishermen who are now in Sri Lankan jails.

May I also request you to take immediate steps to initiate a diplomatic dialogue with the Government of Sri Lanka to immediately stop the recurrence of such incidents of arrest and harassment of Tamil Nadu fishermen in the Palk bay, which is their traditional fishing area from time immemorial? I solicit your personal and immediate intervention in this matter.

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# Seeking personal intervention to secure release of Tamil Nadu fishermen from Sri Lanka

**D.O. letter dated 22.11.2013**

I am extremely distressed to be writing to you yet again bringing to your notice yet another instance of illegal apprehension of innocent Indian fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy on 21st November, 2013, which also happens to be 'World Fisheries Day'. The Government of India's insensitive handling of the entire issue has led to the repeated, increasingly frequent and brutal attacks on fishermen from Tamil Nadu peacefully pursuing their livelihood in their traditional fishing waters. The meek and pusillanimous response of the Government of India to these repeated instances of apprehension have emboldened the Sri Lankan Navy to illegally arrest and detain more and more of our fishermen.

I would like to bring to your notice the latest incident on 21st November, 2013, in which the Sri Lankan Navy brutally abducted 20 poor innocent fishermen along with their 5 fishing boats while they were fishing in their traditional waters of Palk Bay. 20 fishermen set out for fishing from Jagadhapattinam and Kottaipattinam fishing bases of Pudukottai District on 20.11.2013 in 5 mechanised fishing boats bearing registration numbers IND-TN-08-MM-106, IND-TN-08-MM-125, IND-TN-08-MM-245, IND-TN-08-MM-297 and IND-TN-04-MM-173. While they were engaged in fishing in their traditional fishing waters, they were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 21st November, 2013. When the global fishermen community was in a festive mood, celebrating World Fisheries Day, this dastardly act of the Sri Lankan Navy has again cast a pall of gloom over our innocent fishermen and their families.

Incidents of abduction and detention of fishermen from Tamil Nadu for long periods in Sri Lankan prisons have multiplied, even as the Government of India takes little or no action to convey India's strong protest or to use coercive diplomacy to put an end to these marauding attacks. The very serious livelihood problem of hundreds

of thousands of our fishermen is, in fact, being relegated to the backburner as something to be sorted out by the fishermen associations of both countries. The continued insensitive and ham-handed treatment of the Tamil Nadu fishermen issue in the Palk Bay, is fast alienating the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu, who justifiably feel that they have been let down by their own national Government.

I wish to remind you that before the latest incident of 21st November, 2013, 60 fishermen who had earlier been apprehended and remanded to custody, continue to languish inSri Lankan Jails and are yet to be released by the Sri Lankan Government. 42 fishing boats of our fishermen are yet to be returned from Sri Lankan custody causing considerable economic loss to the poor fishermen. May I once again exhort you to personally intervene in the matter and use the highest diplomatic channels of the Government of India to secure the immediate release of 80 fishermen who are currently in Sri Lankan custody including the 20 fishermen who were apprehended on 21st November, 2013, and the 47 Indian fishing boats detained by the Sri Lankan authorities at the earliest?

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# Requesting quick and decisive action for the release of Tamil Nadu fishermen from Sri Lanka

**D.O. letter dated 12.12.2013**

You would recall that I have written to you on numerous occasions bringing to your notice the repeated instances of abduction and apprehension of innocent Indian fishermen belonging to the coastal Districts of Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy while pursuing their peaceful livelihood of fishing in their traditional fishing waters. I had sought a strong diplomatic response from India to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.

I had also been consistently pointing out that the failure of the Government of India to come out strongly in defence of the rights and interests of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu was giving rise to disillusionment and

disquiet amongst the fishermen community and raising tensions to alarming levels. The failure of India to act decisively on this issue has emboldened the Sri Lankan regime to wilfully and with impunity, prey upon the poor fishermen from Tamil Nadu.

What I had feared appears to have come true in the latest incidents, when on 11.12.2013 the Sri Lankan Navy attempted to abduct and apprehend 47 boats with close to 325 fishermen from Nagapattinam District while they were fishing off the Akkaraipettai coast near Nagapattinam. The abduction operation put the lives of several of these fishermen at grave risk since a major confrontation took place in the high seas. Had it not been for the fishermen acting with restraint, and avoiding a direct conflict with the heavily armed Sri Lankan Navy personnel, many innocent lives could have been lost. 110 fishermen in 15 boats quietly surrendered to the Sri Lankan Navy, while 32 boats with 215 fishermen turned back and returned. The Sri Lankan Navy has acted with extreme hostility and punitive intent. It is understood that these 110 fishermen have been taken to Trincomalee for further legal action.

No sooner did the State Government get the details of this shocking incident from the Coastal Security and Intelligence sources, we are now informed that, in yet another incident the Sri Lankan Navy has apprehended 30 fishermen in 8 boats from Tamil Nadu who ventured for fishing from the Jagathapattinam fishing base of Pudukkottai District in the early hours of 12.12.2013.

These are the largest and most outrageous acts of mass abduction of our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy. Such brazen and near warlike acts could not have been carried out without the tacit approval of the Sri Lankan Government. India's prestige and image has suffered grievous damage. The entire fishing community in Tamil Nadu has lost its faith in the ability of the Government of India to protect the lives and livelihood of innocent fishermen in the high seas. Surely, we cannot continue our facile 'do not touch policy' in the face of these audacious and high handed acts that violate the lives and livelihoods of our fishermen anymore?

I earnestly hope that the Government of India would wake up to the reality of the situation at least now and come up with a concrete course of action to resolve this issue.

There has to be an immediate strong, diplomatic initiative including intervention at the highest level. The Sri Lankan High Commissioner in New Delhi must be summoned to the Ministry of External Affairs and our strong protest lodged. Mr. Prime Minister, Sir, you must personally take up this issue with the President of Sri Lanka without any further delay. Failure to take immediate action would be disastrous for the livelihood of the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu. It will also lead to flaring up of socio-economic tensions with the potential to snowball into a major law and order and security issue.

May I urge you to immediately bestow the much needed attention that this extremely volatile, emotive and sensitive issue deserves and to act decisively? The Government of India should not allow this issue to fester anymore through continued inaction or through a weak-kneed and timid approach towards the Sri Lankan regime which continues to perpetrate outrage upon outrage upon innocent Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu pursuing their livelihood.

The fishermen community in Tamil Nadu is in a highly agitated mood and we expect quick and decisive

action by the Government of India to ensure that the 22 fishing boats and 140 fishermen apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the past 24 hours are released forthwith without detention. May I also remind you that another 69 fishermen from Tamil Nadu are already languishing in Sri Lankan Jails and their 47 boats with equipment are still in Sri Lankan custody?

I request your immediate intervention and response.

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# Seeking stern measures to deal with Sri Lankan Authorities in a concrete and decisive manner

## D.O. letter dated 06.01.2014

I am at a loss for words to convey my deepest anguish and frustration over the repeated apprehension and incarceration of a large number of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy. These continued oppressive acts have caused untold misery and hardship to the apprehended fishermen and their families. I wish to draw your attention to my letter dated 30.12.2013 bringing to your notice the apprehension of 40 fishermen and their 9 boats from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy on the 28th and 29th of December, 2013. In recent days, the marauding Sri Lankan Navy has not even spared the poorest fishermen who fish in traditional fishing crafts called "Vallams" and eke out a meagre livelihood in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay.

In the latest incident, 5 Mechanised fishing boats bearing registration numbers IND-TN-09-MM-178, IND-TN-11-MM-195, IND-TN-11-MM-199, IND-TN-11-MM-257 and IND-TN-09-MM-127 with 25 fishermen belonging to Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu set out to fish from Mandapam South fishing base on 2.1.2014. While they were engaged in peaceful fishing in their traditional fishing waters in the Gulf of Mannar, they were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 2.1.2014.

I wish to remind you that 250 Indian fishermen who were apprehended and remanded to custody in Sri Lankan Jails for long periods are yet to be released by the Sri Lankan Government while 79 Indian fishing boats are still in Sri Lankan custody and are being reduced to ruin and will be completely unusable for fishing operations.

The repressive Sri Lankan Navy is establishing its authoritarian presence in the Palk Bay by chasing and arresting unarmed innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu who offer no provocation. These oppressive acts of the Sri Lankan Navy on the direction of the emboldened Sri Lankan regime have caused a great deal of suffering and coupled with the hopelessly inadequate response of the Government of India have given rise to considerable

resentment and angst not only amongst the fishermen community, but also amongst the entire population of Tamil Nadu.

The Indian Government has been a mute spectator all along and not at all willing to understand the sufferings of its own fishermen and their families and intervene effectively. The bread winners of poor fishermen families are kept under detention for months together in an alien land and the only assets they possess to earn their livelihood are also allowed to rot and ruin there due to the inaction of the Indian Government.

May I once again urge your immediate personal intervention and exhort you to use the diplomatic channels of the Government of India in a concrete and decisive manner with the Sri Lankan authorities to secure the immediate release of 250 fishermen who are already languishing in Sri Lankan Jails in addition to the 25 fishermen who were apprehended on 2.1.2014 and the 84 fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody at the earliest?

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## ‘Activate diplomatic channel to secure the release of fishermen’

**D.O. letter dated 30.01.2014**

As you are aware, in a spirit of accommodation, I had facilitated the holding of direct talks between the fishermen communities of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka on 27.1.2014 in Chennai. Based on the overall environment of goodwill created by the holding of the talks, 295 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu and their 45 boats were released by Sri Lanka in the last two weeks.

However, this environment of goodwill has been totally vitiated by an incident which occurred on 29.1.2014 in which 38 hapless Tamil Nadu fishermen were detained by the Sri Lankan Navy in a midnight raid while fishing in their traditional waters in the Palk Bay.

6 Mechanised fishing boats bearing registration number IND-TN-10-MM-88, IND-TN-10-MM-358, IND-TN-09-MM-213, IND-TN-10-MM-205, IND-TN-10-MM-748, IND-TN-09-MM-247, with 38 fishermen belonging to Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu set out for fishing from Rameswaram fishing base on 29.1.2014. While they were engaged in fishing in their traditional fishing waters in Palk Bay, they were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy around midnight on 29.1.2014.

It appears to me that this incident of apprehension is an attempt by elements in the Sri Lankan Navy to deliberately spoil the conducive atmosphere created by the recent talks. Such arrests and apprehension also directly impact the livelihood of the Tamil Nadu fishermen living in the Palk Bay Districts.

In order to preserve the conducive atmosphere and to enable a pragmatic and workable solution to emerge for the day to day fishing activities of the fishermen to continue, I request you to decisively impress upon the Government of Sri Lanka to advise its Navy to abstain from such acts

of illegal abduction of innocent Indian fishermen. I request you to convey an unequivocal and strong disapproval of the belligerent actions of the Sri Lankan Navy and also urge the Sri Lankan Government to direct its Navy not to resort to further illegal arrest and detention of our innocent fishermen.

May I urge your personal intervention and exhort you to use the diplomatic channels of the Government of India in a concrete and decisive manner to secure the release of the 38 fishermen arrested on 29.1.2014 including their 6 boats ?

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# Seeking personal intervention to ensure the immediate release of Tamil Nadu fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 14.02.2014

I am constrained to bring to your notice yet another incident in which 29 of our fishermen were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 13.2.2014. The Sri Lankan Navy is now acting with greater impunity and effectively thwarting Indian fishermen coming from the Coastal Districts of Tamil Nadu from peacefully pursuing their livelihood in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay. Every fishing voyage of our fishermen is now laden with danger and the anxiety of possible attack, harassment, apprehension and custodial detention by the Sri Lankan authorities. It is extremely disheartening that hostile actions have been intensified by the Sri Lankan Navy after the recent fishermen level talks hosted in Chennai, which represented a positive step forward to

resolve the livelihood issues through mutual agreement, between the fishermen of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka with the support of their Governments.

In this current episode, 7 mechanised fishing boats belonging to Ramanathapuram and Pudukkottai Districts, bearing Registration No. IND-TN-10-MM-33, IND-TN-10-MM-836, IND-TN-10-MM-841, IND-TN-11-MM-83, IND-TN-11-MM-46, IND-TN-08-MM-323 and IND-TN-08-MM-349, with 29 fishermen who ventured for fishing from Rameswaram, Mandapam (North) and Jagathapattinam fishing bases have been apprehended in the Palk Bay on 13.2.2014 and it is reported that they have been remanded to the Jaffna prison up to 24.2.2014 by the District and Magistrate's court, Kayts, Jaffna.

I have clearly indicated in my previous letters that the normal life and the right to livelihood of our fishermen of the 5 Coastal Districts of Tamil Nadu, viz. Ramanathapuram, Pudukkottai, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam have been left to the mercy of the marauding Sri Lankan Navy primarily due to the ill-advised 1974 and 1976 Agreements of the Government of India. These agreements have not only snatched away the livelihood of our fishermen but also the sovereign territory of India

- Katchatheevu. The Government of India is yet again treating the livelihood issue of lakhs of fishermen of Tamil Nadu with inexplicable insensitivity. Strong diplomatic action is not being taken by the Government of India to curb such repeated instances of attack, apprehension and unlawful detention of our fishermen.

May I once again exhort you to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan Government and arrange for the immediate release of all the 121 fishermen of Tamil Nadu apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy, who are now in Sri Lankan custody, including the 29 fishermen apprehended on 13.2.2014 and their 26 fishing boats? I once again urge you to intervene personally and ensure that the matter is taken up at the highest diplomatic level for the immediate release of the 121 fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu and their 26 fishing boats.

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# Expressing deep anguish and pain over the continued apprehension of Tamil Nadu fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 04.03.2014

I am at a loss for words to convey my deep anguish and pain over the continued and repeated instances of apprehension and incarceration of a large number of fishermen from Tamil Nadu and their fishing boats by the Sri Lankan Navy and the untold hardship caused to the fishermen and their families.

In the most recent incident, 8 mechanised fishing boats bearing registration numbers IND-TN08-MM-115, IND-TN06-MM-932, IND-TN06-MM-318, IND-TN06-MM-757, IND-TN06-MM-429, IND-TN06-MM-124, IND-TN04-MM-4489 and IND-TN08-MM- 081, with 30 fishermen belonging to Pudukottai District of Tamil Nadu and 2 fishermen from Karaikkal of Puducherry set out for fishing from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukottai

District on 3.3.2014. While they were engaged in fishing in their traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay, they were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the evening of 3.3.2014.

I wish to draw your attention to my letter dated 20.9.2013 proposing fishermen level talks between fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. In order to enable a pragmatic and workable solution to emerge for the day-to-day fishing activities of our fishermen, I had facilitated the holding of direct talks between the fishermen communities of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka on 27.1.2014 in Chennai.

In order to carry forward the constructive process of talks between the fishermen associations of both countries, the next level of fishermen talks have been slated to be held at Colombo on 13.3.2014, subject to the condition that all fishermen from Tamil Nadu and their boats in Sri Lankan custody must be released prior to the talks.

At this juncture, the further apprehension of 32 of our fishermen and their 8 boats has come as a rude shock to the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu. This harsh action of the Sri Lankan Navy against our innocent fishermen must be seen as a deliberate attempt to vitiate the atmosphere

before the talks in Colombo slated for 13.3.2014. The Government of India is perceived as being a passive and mute spectator and not willing to understand and empathize with the sufferings of its own fishermen and their families.

I wish to remind you that 116 fishermen from Tamil Nadu who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy have now been in custody in Sri Lankan Jails for more than a month and 5 fishermen are still languishing in a Sri Lankan jail under a fabricated case for more than 2 years. 31 fishing boats belonging to these fishermen are also wasting away in detention.

May I once again urge your personal intervention in the matter? I also exhort you to decisively use all available diplomatic channels of the Government of India to secure the immediate release of 153 fishermen who are languishing in Sri Lankan Jails including the 32 fishermen, who were apprehended on 3.3.2014 and 39 fishing boats from Sri Lankan custody at the earliest.

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## Demanding speedy release of 177 Tamil Nadu fishermen and their boats

**D.O. letter dated 07.03.2014**

"I had written to you just two days ago on 04.03.2014, bringing to your notice the apprehension of 32 fishermen and 8 boats from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy on 03.03.2014. Two further incidents occurred in rapid succession on 5.3.2014, in which 24 Tamil Nadu fishermen, while fishing in their traditional waters in the Palk Bay were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy.

Three Motorised traditional fishing boats bearing registration numbers TN-09-WV-859, TN-09-WV-921, TN-08-WV-1071, with 15 fishermen and 2 mechanised fishing boats bearing registration numbers IND-TN-10-MM-554, IND-TN-10-MM-873 with 9 fishermen belonging to Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, set out for fishing from Rameswaram fishing base on 05.03.2014. While they were engaged in fishing in their traditional

fishing waters, they were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 05.03.2014. All 24 fishermen apprehended have been produced before the Magistrate's Court, Mannar, Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan Navy continues to harass our fishermen, deprive them of their livelihood and their indispensable fishing assets, thereby unleashing a reign of terror and oppression on our poor, innocent Tamil fishermen. These repeated incidents occurring with such rapid succession, particularly, when I had written calling for an early release of the fishermen before the talks scheduled on 13.03.2014, lead me to wonder whether the Sri Lankan Navy is acting in a deliberate and calculated manner to vitiate the conducive environment before the talks and making a sinister attempt to nullify the positive and proactive steps taken to work out a pragmatic solution for the day-to-day fishing activities of our fishermen. The ineffective and weak response from the Government of India to these continuous incidents of apprehension and attack on our fishermen in their traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay, has only further emboldened the Sri Lankan Navy to act in a brazen manner.

I wish to remind you that 148 fishermen who were apprehended and remanded in Sri Lankan Jails for more than a month as well as 5 fishermen who have been languishing in a Sri Lankan jail for more than two years

on a fabricated case are yet to be released along with their 39 fishing boats.

I strongly urge you to ensure that the matter is immediately taken up at the highest diplomatic level for the immediate release of the 177 Tamil Nadu fishermen and their 44 boats, which includes the 24 fishermen and 5 boats taken into custody on 05.03.2014. All our fishermen and their boats should be released prior to the talks scheduled on 13.03.2014 at Colombo.

May I request an immediate reply?"

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# Reiterating need for conducive atmosphere for talks on release of fishermen

**D.O. letter dated 20.03.2014**

"Kindly recall my letter dated 20.09.2013 in which I had proposed fishermen level talks between the fishermen of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. I had also written to you pointing out that, despite recurrent instances of violent attacks and abductions on the high seas in the Palk Bay by the Sri Lankan Navy, the Tamil Nadu fishermen, in an accommodative frame of mind, are eager to sort out the day-to-day issues faced by them by engaging in talks with the fishermen from Sri Lanka. I had requested that all arrangements be made to have the talks at Chennai between our fishermen and their counterparts in Sri Lanka. Accordingly the fishermen level talks were held on 27.01.2014.

My Government had also conveyed to the Ministry of External Affairs that the next round of talks between

Tamil Nadu fishermen and fishermen from Sri Lanka may be held on 13.03.2014 at Colombo. It was categorically stated in that letter that the talks may be held subject to the release of the Tamil Nadu fishermen and their boats in Sri Lankan custody. Due to my persistent efforts the fishermen, who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy after the talks on 27.01.2014, along with their boats, have now been released by the Sri Lankan courts. The Government of Tamil Nadu had also released 39 Sri Lankan fishermen and their 18 boats. Consequent to the release of our fishermen, my Government had conveyed to the Government of India that the revised date for the fishermen level talks would be on 25.03.2014 at Colombo.

While the Government of Tamil Nadu has taken such a positive and accommodative stance, it is most disconcerting and shocking to learn that the Sri Lankan Navy has resumed its marauding acts of assault and apprehension of innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu. I am dismayed by the report that, in two separate incidents on 19.03.2014, the Sri Lankan Navy has apprehended 74 fishermen and their 18 boats of which 37 fishermen and 11 boats belong to Pudukottai and Thanjavur Districts, 21 fishermen and 5 boats belong to Ramanathapuram District, and 16 fishermen and 2 boats belong to Karaikal, Puducherry.

This latest incident, coming as it does on the eve of the fishermen level talks, is an extremely unfortunate

episode. This belligerent action has caused tremendous anxiety and agitation amongst the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu. Inspite of the assiduous and decisive steps being taken by my Government to defuse the tense situation prevailing in the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu and to create a conducive and accommodative atmosphere for the smooth conduct of the bilateral fishermen level talks, the action of the Sri Lankan Navy has come as a rude shock to the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu.

This latest incident definitely requires your personal intervention and I exhort you to take concrete and decisive action to ensure the immediate release of the 74 fishermen apprehended on 19.03.2014 with their 18 boats. Only such a decisive action, taken at the earliest, would facilitate the smooth conduct of fishermen level talks between the two countries scheduled to be held on 25.03.2014. **I wish to reiterate categorically that, in order to ensure that the talks are conducted in a conducive atmosphere, all the apprehended Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan custody should be released. The talks can take place as scheduled on 25.03.2014, only if all our fishermen and their boats are released before that date".**

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# Chief Minister seeks firm action from new Government to solve fishermen problems

**D.O. letter dated 01.06.2014**

"I write this letter with a deep sense of anguish that, right at the beginning of the fishing season on June 1st, after a 45 day fishing ban, 33 innocent Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, along with their 7 fishing boats, have been apprehended and detained by the Sri Lankan Navy. There were 76 incidents of apprehension and 67 incidents of attacks on and harassment of Indian fishermen of Tamil Nadu in the past three years by the Sri Lankan Navy. I had written to the former Prime Minister on numerous occasions over the past three years seeking strong diplomatic action to ensure that such incidents do not occur, but to no avail.

It has been reported that seven Mechanized Fishing Boats bearing Registration Nos. IND-TN-10-MM-123, IND-TN-10-MM-263, IND-TN-10-MM-344, IND-TN-10-MM-368,IND-TN-10-MM-372, IND-TN-10-MM-446 & IND-TN-10-MM-571, which went for fishing on 31.05.2014, from the Rameswaram fishing base of

Ramanathapuram District with 33 fishermen on board, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 1st June, 2014, and they have been taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka. This resumption of abductions and detentions has sent shock waves throughout the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu. There was an expectation that, with the change of Government at the Centre, there would be a reset in the relations with Sri Lanka and such attacks and apprehensions would cease.

The right of livelihood of our fishermen to fish in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay, to which they have a historic claim, is being infringed repeatedly and effectively abrogated by Sri Lanka. This is caused in no small measure because of the action of the Government of India having entered into an ill-advised agreement, which ceded to Sri Lanka the islet of Katchatheevu, which was historically part of India's territory and undisputedly an integral part of India.

Despite the non-conducive atmosphere created by the actions of the Sri Lankan Government, including the recurrent instances of violent attacks upon and abductions of our fishermen on the high seas in the Palk Bay, the seizure and destruction of boats and fishing equipment by the Sri Lankan Navy and the prolonged detention of scores of poor fishermen from Tamil Nadu in Sri Lankan jails, our fishermen in an accommodative frame of mind, were eager to sort out the day-to-day issues faced by them

by engaging in talks with fishermen from Sri Lanka. The Government of Tamil Nadu facilitated two rounds of bilateral fishermen level talks in Chennai on January 27th, 2014, and in Colombo on May 12th, 2014. The Sri Lankan stand in these talks has been obdurate and it is unfortunate that despite the Government of Tamil Nadu taking a positive approach and helping to facilitate fishermen level talks, the instances of attack on and abduction of innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu continue unabated.

The meek and weak response of the erstwhile UPA Government to the repeated instances of abduction of and attacks on our fishermen in their traditional waters has emboldened the Sri Lankan Navy to act brutally against our innocent fishermen. I hope that there will now be a decisive shift in the stance of the Government of India towards handling this issue under your leadership, and that the Government of India will now take the necessary steps to find a lasting and permanent solution to this vexatious question, which has a highly emotive impact amongst the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu and grave security implications for our State.

In order to put an end to the systematic violence unleashed by the Sri Lankan Navy and to decisively impress upon the Government of Sri Lanka that the Government of India would not tolerate such acts of brutality by the Sri Lankan Navy against our innocent fishermen, I request you to put in place a strong and robust diplomatic response

and ensure that India registers the strongest disapproval of the belligerent actions of the Sri Lankan Navy.

May I also request you to proactively initiate an appropriate and calibrated set of actions that will bring about a permanent end to the perennial problem that plagues the livelihoods of lakhs of Tamil Nadu fishermen who fish in their traditional fishing grounds in the Palk Bay, facing the daily threat of attack and abduction at the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy? This would be in sharp contrast to the passive and immobile policy paralysis that characterized the approach of the UPA Government for several years. There is high expectation in Tamil Nadu that the new NDA led Government at the Centre would act decisively on this very sensitive issue, which involves the livelihood of lakhs of poor fishermen households in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu.

I urge your personal intervention in the matter and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities in a concrete and decisive manner so as to secure the immediate release of 33 fishermen who were apprehended on 1st June, 2014, and their 7 fishing boats from Sri Lankan custody at the earliest. We hope that the firmness of India's response would ensure that such instances do not recur hereafter.

May I look forward to early action?"

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# Chief Minister seeks permanent solution to fishermen's woes

## D.O. letter dated 08.06.2014

"At the outset let me thank you for the very prompt and effective action taken on my letter dated 1st June, 2014, in which I had brought to your attention the apprehension of 33 fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy. Owing to your immediate intervention, all the fishermen were promptly released without being subjected to prolonged detention.

As I had pointed out in the Memorandum, which I presented to you on 3rd June, 2014, the protection of the traditional fishing rights of Indian fishermen in the Palk Bay and ensuring their safety and security remains a serious issue because of the aggressive posture taken by the Sri Lankan side. In the last three years, there have been 77 incidents of apprehension and 67 incidents of harassment of and attacks on our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy, causing tremendous agitation amongst the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu.

It seems to me that the tide has not yet really turned so far as this long standing issue involving our fishermen is concerned. I write to you again with a deep sense of anguish that in the late hours of 7th June, 2014, 82 innocent Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, along with their 18 fishing boats have been apprehended and detained by the Sri Lankan Navy in two separate incidents.

We are informed that 10 mechanized fishing boats with 50 fishermen which went for fishing on $7^{th}$ June, 2014, from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of $7^{th}$ June, 2014.

In yet another incident on $7^{th}$ June, 2014, 8 mechanized fishing boats, seven from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukottai District with 26 fishermen on board and 1 fishing boat from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanthapuram District with 6 fishermen, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of $7^{th}$ June, 2014, and they have been taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

The repetition of such aggressive acts by the Sri Lankan side, immediately after the change in Government at the Centre and the consequent reset in our relations with Sri Lanka does not seem to augur well for the peaceful pursuit of fishing in the Palk Bay by fishermen from Tamil Nadu. It is important that the repeated infringements and effective abrogation of the very basic

human right to livelihood of our fishermen to fish in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay, to which they have a historic claim, are strongly and decisively dealt with by the Government of India at the highest diplomatic level with the Government of Sri Lanka.

A permanent solution to this problem must be found by a decisive initiative under your leadership. In my Memorandum dated 03.06.2014, I had outlined the contours of some of the elements of such a permanent solution, including the retrieval of the islet of Katchatheevu, which was historically part of India's territory until it was unilaterally ceded to Sri Lanka by the Government of India. Talks between the fishermen of the two sides could also help to resolve day-to-day issues provided they are held in a conducive atmosphere and in an accommodative spirit of mutual understanding and reciprocity. Even on this limited issue, the Sri Lankan side had adopted obdurate and obstructive attitudes which led to the failure of the last round of talks held in Colombo in May 2014.

In order to put an end to the unabated, brutal, unprovoked attacks on and abduction of our fishermen by the marauding Sri Lankan Navy, the time has now come to lay down a time bound action plan to achieve a long-term, permanent solution to the problem and also to put in place a strong and robust diplomatic response. I am confident that with the Government of India and the Government

of Tamil Nadu acting in concert, it would be possible to achieve a permanent solution to this vexatious issue.

As an immediate measure, I request you to kindly ensure that India registers the strongest disapproval of the belligerent actions of the Sri Lankan Navy. Given the question of livelihood for the families and dependents of the poor fishermen who have been arrested, I urge you to have this issue taken up at the highest level on the Sri Lankan side to secure the immediate release of the 82 Indian fishermen who were apprehended on 7$^{th}$ June, 2014, with their 18 fishing boats. I would also like to point out that the 6 boats belonging to the fishermen who were apprehended on 1$^{st}$ June, 2014, and have since returned to Tamil Nadu, are still under Sri Lankan custody and it is my request that the return of these 6 boats may also be taken up with the Sri Lankan authorities".

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# Seeking Prime Minister's personal intervention for immediate release of fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 19.06.2014

"It deeply pains me to have to write to you yet again, bringing to your notice two separate incidents in which 46 Indian fishermen along with 11 boats from Tamil Nadu have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. 24 fishermen in 6 mechanized fishing boats bearing registration Nos. IND/TN/08/MM/90, IND/TN/08/MM/371, IND/TN/08/MM/321, IND/TN/10/MM/644, IND/TN/10/MM/647 and IND/TN/10/MM/798, set out for fishing from Kottaipattinam fishing base in Pudukottai District. On the evening of 18.06.2014, they were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

In yet another incident, five mechanized fishing boats bearing registration Nos.IND/TN/10/MM/65, IND/TN/10/MM/457, IND/TN/10/MM/472, IND/TN/10/MM/304 and IND/TN/10/MM/436, with 22 fishermen from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District,

have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the night of 18.06.2014, and taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka. Further, one mechanized fishing boat bearing registration No.IND/TN/10/MM/038 was damaged by the Sri Lankan Navy and the boat was reported to have sunk and the five fishermen on board were rescued by fellow fishermen. The five fishermen have returned to Rameswaram safely.

On the two previous occasions when I had brought such instances to your kind notice, your immediate response in ensuring the release and repatriation of all the fishermen from Tamil Nadu who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy was widely appreciated by all sections of Society in Tamil Nadu.

Unfortunately, while the fishermen have been released, their boats and fishing gear, which are essential for them to earn their livelihood, have not yet been released. Long periods of disuse would condemn the boats and equipment to ruin and the poor fishermen, who are currently suffering a temporary loss of livelihood, would be subjected to a huge permanent loss. Hence, it is essential that the early release of the boats and fishing gear is also secured.

In your reply dated 4th June, 2014, to my letter on this issue, you had also sought our co-operation for the release of arrested Sri Lankan fishermen. On our part, Tamil Nadu, as a reciprocal gesture of goodwill, has released all the Sri Lankan fishermen who were in our custody.

In this context, the latest belligerent act of the Sri Lankan Navy perpetrated on innocent and unarmed Indian fishermen with a motive to intimidate and prevent them from venturing into their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay and in the vicinity of Katchatheevu, which has always been a part of the traditional fishing area of our fishermen, adds to the immense frustration that has built up among the fishermen community of Tamil Nadu.

My Government strongly believes that the unconstitutional Indo-Sri Lankan Agreements of 1974 and 1976 should be nullified and the traditional rights of our fishermen restored at the earliest. I would like to reiterate that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. I had personally filed W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008, in which the Government of Tamil Nadu had also subsequently impleaded itself. The main prayer before the Supreme Court is to declare the 1974 and 1976 agreements along with the Executive Order of 1976 as null and void in the absence of the required mandatory Constitutional amendment, and to retrieve Katchatheevu for India. Our stand is that Katchatheevu has always been a part of India, geographically, culturally and historically

and needs to be retrieved, keeping in view the livelihood interests and security of lakhs of Indian fishermen.

Moreover, our fishermen belonging to districts abutting the Palk Bay continue to fish for basic livelihood in their traditional waters where they have been historically fishing before any politically or any artificially drawn boundaries were created.

My Government has taken many steps towards diversification of fishing activities amongst the Palk Bay fishing communities, including provision of subsidy assistance for purchasing deep sea tuna long liners and promoting use of gill nets. We have also proposed the development of fishing harbours with fish landing facilities at Mookkaiyur and Rameswaram in Ramanathapuram District. The above steps would reduce the pressure in the Palk Bay. These proposals were included in the Memorandum I presented to you on 03.06.2014.

We have also encouraged the fishermen level talks so that a sustainable and permanent solution through bilateral talks is worked out. While the bilateral fishermen level talks held at Chennai on 27.01.2014 yielded positive responses, the subsequent talks held at Colombo on 12.05.2014 could not make any headway thanks to the premeditated obstructionist stance of the Sri Lankan officials. But we are committed to continuing the dialogue process of the stakeholders.

It is heartening to note from your letter dated 4th June, 2014, that the Union Government is in agreement with the State Government on ensuring the livelihood, safety, security and welfare of our fishermen. I am sure the Government of India and Government of Tamil Nadu, working in tandem, can find a lasting solution to this issue. The vexatious issue of ensuring the safety, security and livelihood of our fishermen in the Palk Bay requires a strong and sustained diplomatic response so that a lasting solution, including the restoration of fishing rights of Indian fishermen in their traditional fishing waters, is found.

I exhort you to take immediate action through diplomatic channels to secure the release of all the 46 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu who are in Sri Lankan custody along with their 11 boats as well as the release of the earlier apprehended 23 boats which are still in Sri Lankan custody and arrange for their immediate repatriation. May I request your immediate personal intervention in this matter?"

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# Plea for strong diplomatic action to free fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 29.06.2014

"I would like to thank you for your prompt and positive response to my earlier letter dated 19th June, 2014. The effective intervention by the Government of India led to the release of 46 fishermen who had been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 18th June, 2014. In response to my letter dated 24.06.2014, it is reported that 7 fishermen in 1 mechanized boat detained by the Sri Lankan Navy on 19.06.2014 have also been released. However, 11 more fishermen who were apprehended on the 23rd of this month are yet to be released by the Sri Lankan Government. Further, the boats and gear of the fishermen released so far are yet to be returned to them, thus affecting their livelihood.

Meanwhile, I am compelled to bring to your notice yet another needlessly aggressive act committed by the Sri Lankan Navy in which 17 fishermen from Rameshwaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District

of Tamil Nadu have been detained. It is reported that 17 fishermen in 3 mechanized fishing boats set out for fishing from Rameshwaram fishing base on 28.06.2014 and in the early hours of 29.06.2014 they were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy and taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka.

These continued and repeated instances of apprehension and abduction of our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy are adding to the very heightened sense of unrest and resentment among the Tamil Nadu fishermen who are struggling to eke out their livelihood from a very difficult and increasingly dangerous profession.

You will no doubt recall from my earlier letters that our fishermen pursue their traditional avocation in their historic and traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay. I would like to reiterate that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the very ownership of Katchatheevu islet and the unconstitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements by which the islet was ceded to Sri Lanka are the subject matter of litigation in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

Hence it is imperative that the traditional livelihood of our fishermen should not be allowed to be disrupted by the hostile actions of the Sri Lankan Navy. My Government looks to your immediate and emphatic response to this issue and to ensure that it is taken up at the highest levels

of the Sri Lankan Government, so that our fishermen are not repeatedly arrested and abducted in the high seas of the Palk Bay.

I request you to kindly ensure an early and strong diplomatic action to secure the immediate release of all the 28 Indian fishermen along with their 41 fishing boats, including the 11 fishermen and 38 boats already in Sri Lankan custody. I look forward to an early and decisive response."

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# Expressing shock at MEA stand on maritime boundary

## D.O. letter dated 02.07.2014

"In the counter affidavit filed by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, before the Madras High Court in Writ Petitions filed by the Fisherman Care of Pallavaram it has been indicated that the Maritime Boundary between India and Sri Lanka is a settled matter. The counter affidavit further indicates that Indian fishermen have no traditional fishing rights in the area around Katchatheevu Island. It appears that the counsels representing the Ministry of External Affairs have also orally reiterated the same stand before the First Bench of the Madras High Court.

I was appalled and shocked to read the newspaper reports relating to this matter. Perhaps this counter affidavit had been prepared and approved by the earlier UPA Government and the matter was not brought to your personal attention.

In this context, you would recollect that I had specifically raised the issue of retrieving India's sovereignty over the Katchatheevu Island in the Memorandum I had presented to you on 3rd June, 2014. It has always been the stand of my Government that Katchatheevu is an integral part of the territory of India. This small island of approximately 285 acres in the Palk Straits off Rameswaram, is part of Ramanthapuram District of Tamil Nadu. It was originally under the ownership of the Raja of Ramanathapuram for which there is sufficient documentary proof. The Indian fishermen enjoyed traditional fishing rights in and around the island of Katchatheevu and the Palk Bay. As per Agreements entered into by the Government of India in 1974 and 1976, Katchatheevu was ceded to Sri Lanka and the fishermen of Tamil Nadu have been deprived of their fishing rights around Katchatheevu and the Palk Bay ever since then.

As early as in 1991, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly passed a Resolution seeking the restoration of Katchatheevu Island and the sea area adjacent to it to India. I have personally filed a Writ Petition (W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008) in this regard in the Supreme Court of India in 2008 and the Revenue Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, has also impleaded itself in 2011.

As per the order of the Supreme Court of India in the Berubari case of 1960, a part of any territory owned by India can be ceded to another country only through a

Constitutional Amendment. However, Katchatheevu was ceded to Sri Lanka without a Constitutional amendment and hence the ceding is unlawful and not valid. The unconstitutional ceding of the island and the fishing grounds in the vicinity have emboldened the Sri Lankan Navy to resort to frequent attacks on our innocent fishermen who fish in their traditional fishing grounds.

Hence I had requested that the Government of India should take active steps to abrogate the 1974 and 1976 agreements and retrieve Katchatheevu and restore the traditional fishing rights of the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. I have also repeatedly emphasized in my letters to you that the question of sovereignty over Katchatheevu should not be treated as a settled issue. In this context, I would like to point out that even in 1974, the former Prime Minister, Thiru. A B Vajpayee, the then leader of the Jan Sangh, had stated that he would file a case against the ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka by the then Congress Government.

The affidavit filed on behalf of the Ministry of External Affairs in the Madras High Court, therefore, comes as a rude shock.

I request you to kindly have the matter reviewed and direct the concerned officials to file an appropriately revised affidavit in the Court which adequately reflects our concerns, without further delay".

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# Centre must ask Sri Lanka to rein in its Navy

**D.O. letter dated 06.07.2014**

"I thank you for the prompt and effective action taken by your Government which led to the speedy release of 184 fishermen from Sri Lankan custody since the new Government assumed office at the Centre, under your leadership.

I would like to emphasize that, even though the fishermen were set free from Sri Lankan Jails, their 41 fishing craft and gear continue to be impounded. The Sri Lankan Government appears to be adopting a callous and deliberate strategy to ensure destruction of the boats and gear which are the primary means of livelihood of our fishermen. The long duration of impoundment and lack of care would render the fishing boats and gear unusable and worthless. Thus the strategy is designed to directly deprive fishermen of their livelihood.

The unlawful apprehension of our fishermen continues unabated and I understand that in yet another incident on 05.07.2014, 20 fishermen in 4 mechanized fishing boats, who set out for fishing from Rameswaram and Mandapam fishing bases in Ramanathapuram District, were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 05.07.2014 and were taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka.

The right of livelihood of our fishermen who historically and traditionally fish in the Palk Bay is continuously infringed upon by the Sri Lankan Navy. The historical rights were simply signed away as part of the ill advised Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 which also unilaterally ceded Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka without having any foresight or concern for the plight of our innocent fishermen. As I have already pointed out, the validity of these agreements is the subject matter of a writ petition pending in the Supreme Court of India. In this context, the Government of Tamil Nadu continues to reiterate that the issue of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and Katchatheevu cannot be treated as a settled issue. Only the retrieval of Katchatheevu will ensure the restoration of safety and security of our fishermen's livelihood in the traditional waters of Palk Bay.

I request the Government of India to impress upon the Sri Lankan Government to rein in their Navy and to refrain from apprehending our innocent fishermen who are

in peaceful pursuit of their livelihood in their traditional fishing waters.

I request the Government of India to initiate immediate efforts to find a permanent and pragmatic solution to this livelihood issue of our fishermen. I once again call for your immediate intervention to secure the release of the 37 fishermen and 45 fishing boats currently in Sri Lankan custody including the 20 fishermen and 4 fishing boats, apprehended on 05.07.2014. I confidently look forward to early and decisive action by the Government of India under your leadership to resolve this long standing issue".

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# Demanding an inter ministerial group on fishermen issue

## D.O. letter dated 21.07.2014

"I have written to you a number of times since you assumed office on the issue of the harsh harassment meted out to Indian fishermen, in particular from Tamil Nadu, by the Sri Lankan Navy when they fish in their traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay. In the Memorandum that I presented to you on 3rd June, 2014, I have also outlined some of the measures that would need to be taken to ensure a long-term solution to the problem.

I must thank you for the proactive and positive manner in which your Government has approached the issue. Your officers have acted promptly to secure the release of detained fishermen from Tamil Nadu. I learn that the External Affairs Minister had also chaired an Inter-Ministerial Meeting on the India-Sri Lanka Fishermen's issue on 17th June, 2014. While I welcome the much needed attention that this issue is finally receiving at a

high level in the Government of India, I am concerned about some of the actionable points that emerged from the meeting. These have been communicated to the State Government by the Fisheries Development Commissioner, Department of Animal Husbandry and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, in his letter number Pt.F.No.27017/4/1998 Fy(T-5)/ (IC) Vol. II dated 15th July, 2014.

First and foremost is the suggestion that the Department of Border Management, Ministry of Home Affairs, with assistance from the Director General of Lighthouses and Lightships would prepare a feasibility study on the possibility of installing buoys on the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL).In my Memorandum presented to you and in my letters on this issue, I have requested you to retrieve India's sovereignty over Katchatheevu islet which was unconstitutionally and illegally ceded to Sri Lanka under the Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976. Moreover, the Government of Tamil Nadu is also now a party to a suit filed by me in the Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of the ceding of Katchatheevu islet. The matter is still pending in the Supreme Court and will have a bearing on the location of the IMBL. The Government of Tamil Nadu has not accepted the IMBL as a settled issue. Given that the issue is sub judice, it would neither be appropriate nor feasible to install buoys along the IMBL at this point in time.

Regarding the proposal to diversify the fishing-based livelihood of the fishermen in Tamil Nadu, we have already taken some measures including a 50 per cent subsidy scheme to procure new tuna long liners which are ocean-going vessels. You would recall that I had already requested a Comprehensive Special Package for Diversification of Fisheries at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging as part of the Memorandum presented to you on 3rd June, 2014.

**This Package includes the following elements:**

★ A provision of Rs. 975 crore over three years to procure new Deep Sea Tuna Long Liners so as to reduce the pressure of bottom-trawling boats in the Palk Bay;

★ Assistance for a Mid Sea Fish Processing Park, at an approximate cost of Rs.80 crore, including a 'Carrier Mother Vessel' stationed at mid-sea to support and supply 'Baby Vessels' involved in commercial fishing in the deep seas. This will add value to the fish caught in the deep seas and also reduce the pressure of fishing in the shallow waters of Palk Bay.

★ The Government of India was requested to sanction a grant of Rs.420 crore for the Creation of Infrastructural facilities for Deep Sea Fishing

in Mookaiyur and Rameswaram Fishing Harbours in Ramanathapuram District, and Ennore Fishing Harbour in Tiruvallur District.

★ An annual grant of Rs.10 crore for dredging of fishing harbours and bar mouths.

★ To review and remove the impractical eligibility criteria of the boat owners to be in the BPL category and the unrealistic monthly ceiling of 500 litres under the scheme for Reimbursement of Central Excise Duty on High Speed Diesel (HSD) for Mechanized Boats.

★ To enhance the present annual allocation for the scheme for Motorisation of Traditional Crafts from the present level of Rs.3 crore to at least Rs.9 crore per year so that in a period of five years all the remaining 32,000 traditional craft can be motorized.

In addition to what has already been proposed in the Comprehensive Package, a further subsidy of Rs.100 crore to convert to gill nets will also enable introduction of sustainable fishing practices in the Palk Bay.

The Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar are special ecological zones and the Gulf of Mannar is home to India's first Marine Bio-Sphere reserve. The Palk Bay is quite shallow. Hence both these areas are not suitable for open sea mariculture. Moreover, the scope for extensive aquaculture in the coastal

districts is also limited as agriculturists have objected to the potential salinisation of fresh water aquifers caused by aquaculture activities.

In the fishermen level talks between the fishing communities of both countries, there has been a clear recognition that fishing by fishermen of both countries could co-exist in the traditional fishing waters with both sides agreeing on the fishing days and a thrust given to sustainable fishing practices like use of gill nets and long liners. This approach has also been deliberated upon in the Indo-Sri Lankan Joint Working Group and needs to be intensively pursued.

I do hope that the Inter Ministerial Group will take note of the concerns of Tamil Nadu and accordingly pursue further action to enable an appropriate long-term solution to this sensitive issue".

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# Calling for decisive measures to solve fishermen livelihood

## D.O. letter dated 22.07.2014

"I am constrained to bring to your notice two more incidents of apprehension of our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy in their traditional waters in the Palk Bay.

It has been brought to my notice that, in a recent incident which took place on 21st July, 2014, 18 fishermen in 5 mechanized fishing boats who set out for fishing from Jegadapattinam and Kottaipattinam fishing bases in Pudukottai District were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 21.07.2014 and have been taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

In another incident on the same day, 21.07.2014, the Sri Lankan Navy apprehended 20 fishermen along with their 4 fishing boats who set out for fishing from Rameswaram fishing base in Ramanathapuram District on 21.07.2014 and have been taken to Thalaimannar.

I am also informed that, in a previous incident on 16.07.2014, 5 fishermen from Pudukottai District were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. They were reportedly drifting due to engine failure but unfortunately they were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy and have been remanded up to 31.07.2014 by the Kayts Court.

The instances of apprehension of our fishermen continue unabated and are creating a sense of fear, anxiety and unrest among the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu.

While your Government has taken prompt action from time to time to secure the release of 225 fishermen from Sri Lankan custody, it is disheartening to note that their 46 fishing boats continue to stay impounded. This deliberate strategy of the Sri Lankan Government to destroy the primary means of livelihood of our fishermen is condemnable. I request the Government of India to take up this matter with the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure the immediate release of the impounded fishing boats and gear before they are rendered useless.

The Government of Tamil Nadu reiterates its firm commitment to the restoration of traditional fishing rights of our fishermen in the Palk Bay and the retrieval of Katchatheevu which had been an integral part of India since time immemorial. The Government of India should also not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the

constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by me in my personal capacity and also by the Government of Tamil Nadu in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

I have already written to you on 21st July, 2014, on the permanent measures that need to be taken to resolve this long festering issue. I request the Government of India to initiate decisive measures along the lines already suggested by me to find a permanent solution to this livelihood issue of our fishermen. In the meantime, I once again request your immediate intervention to secure the release of the 43 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu and their 55 fishing boats including the 46 mechanized fishing boats that are already under Sri Lankan custody".

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# A call for immediate release of fishermen, boats

## D.O. letter dated 29.07.2014

"I write this letter with a deep sense of anguish, to bring to your notice yet another incident in which 50 fishermen from Tamil Nadu in 5 mechanized fishing boats and 2 vallams have been arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy. The fishermen had set out for fishing from the Nagapattinam fishing base of Nagapattinam District and were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 29.07.2014 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

You may recall that, in my letter dated 22.07.2014, I had informed you about the apprehension of 9 boats and 43 fishermen from Tamil Nadu. I wish to inform you that these 43 fishermen and their 9 boats have not yet been released.

Your Government had acted promptly on earlier occasions which led to the release of 225 apprehended

fishermen from Sri Lankan custody from time to time. However, as part of a deliberate and callous design, the Sri Lankan side is yet to release the 55 boats and fishing gear which were impounded from Tamil Nadu fishermen apprehended earlier. Without their fishing boats and gear, the poor fishermen have lost their means of livelihood. This is causing considerable disquiet and unrest amongst the fishermen community in the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu. Therefore, I request you again to kindly take decisive steps to ensure the immediate release of the boats and fishing gear of our fishermen which are still in Sri Lankan custody. I also request you to impress upon the Sri Lankan Government that they should abandon their inhuman strategy of impounding the boats and fishing gear for extended periods of time.

The Government of Tamil Nadu reiterates its firm commitment to the restoration of the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen in the Palk Bay and the retrieval of Katchatheevu which had been an integral part of India since time immemorial. The Government of India should also not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by me in my personal capacity and also by the Government of Tamil Nadu in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

I once again request you to immediately take up the issue of frequent apprehension of our fishermen and their boats by the Sri Lankan Navy at the highest diplomatic levels so as to secure the immediate release of all the 93 fishermen from Tamil Nadu including the 43 fishermen apprehended earlier and the 62 boats, including the 55 boats impounded earlier, from Sri Lankan custody".

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## 'India should protest Sri Lanka defence ministry's tasteless gibe'

### D.O. letter dated 01.08.2014

"It has been brought to my notice that the official website of the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, Government of Sri Lanka, has prominently hosted just under its homepage banner a link to an article entitled "How meaningful are Jayalalitha's love letters to Narendra Modi?" The visual rendering on the homepage of the official website just above the link is highly objectionable as it depicted both the Prime Minister of India and the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu in a very trivialized, derogatory and disrespectful manner.

The article itself contained certain unwarranted and unfounded comments about the very valid and serious issues that I have consistently been raising relating to the repeated instances of harassment by the Sri Lankan Navy of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu fishing in their traditional waters. This is a livelihood issue for lakhs of

fishermen families in my State whose cause I have been espousing and will continue to espouse strongly. I have also clearly explained the legal basis on which the Government of Tamil Nadu refuses to recognize the unlawful ceding of Katchatheevu under the Indo-Sri Lanka agreements of 1974 and 1976 and the issue pertaining to the alignment of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL).

The article analysis also ascribes motives to me without any basis at all, including the insinuation that I demanded the release of boats which are crucial to the survival of fishermen families, because “some of these may belong to her or her supporters”. This is a vile, distasteful and baseless allegation. The article also tries to mischievously create fissures within India’s federal polity where none exist through statements like: “Obviously she is attempting to dent the popularity of the Indian Prime Minister…….”.

While as a public political figure in a vibrant democracy with full freedom of press, I have faced criticism and comment from many sources, this blatant attempt to ridicule, and trivialize the untiring efforts made by a democratically elected leader to resolve an important livelihood issue of the fishermen of Tamil Nadu by hosting a highly objectionable article prominently on the official website of an important Ministry of a neighbouring country, is completely unacceptable. The added visual image on the website is clearly aimed at denigrating the elected leaders of India, the world’s largest democracy,

and particularly a 66 year old woman political leader of many years standing. These are affronts to India which cannot be ignored or lightly brushed aside.

More importantly, although there was a disclaimer on the website stating that the Ministry of Defence bears no responsibility for the ideas and opinion expressed by the numerous contributors to the “Opinion Page” of the website, the visual itself depicting the Prime Minister of India and the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu is not part of the article written by a journalist but a visual deliberately and mischievously put up on the official website itself. This reprehensible visual itself clearly indicates that these are not necessarily the views of the author but of the Sri Lankan Government itself.

I understand that, following the public outcry in Tamil Nadu, the article and the visual have both been surreptitiously removed from the official website. However, the damage has already been done.

I therefore request you to immediately direct the Ministry of External Affairs to summon the Sri Lankan High Commissioner and clearly express India’s displeasure at the manner in which the article was hosted on the official website of the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, Government of Sri Lanka, and seek an unconditional apology from the Government of Sri Lanka.”

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# Demanding mechanisms to resolve fishing dispute

## D.O. letter dated 02.09.2014

"This is to bring to your notice two more incidents of apprehension of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy while fishing in their traditional waters in the Palk Bay. In the first incident, 9 fishermen set sail in 2 fishing boats from Ramanathapuram District on 01.09.2014 for fishing and one mechanised fishing boat sank in the sea. The fishermen on board the boat that sank were rescued by the fishermen in the other boat. This boat which had rescued the fishermen who were in distress was apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy along with all 9 fishermen and taken to Kankesanthurai and they have been remanded up to 16.09.2014.

In another incident which took place on 02.09.2014, a fishing boat from Ramanathapuram District carrying 6 fishermen developed mechanical failure and sank. It is reported that these 6 fishermen have also been apprehended

by the Sri Lankan Navy and taken to Karainagar Naval base, Sri Lanka.

In the last two months, there have been 15 incidents of apprehensions wherein 319 fishermen from Tamil Nadu have been apprehended along with their 62 fishing boats. Due to the efforts of your Government all the 319 fishermen have been released. Unfortunately the 62 fishing boats continue to be in Sri Lankan custody.

The Sri Lankan Government's inhumane and cruel strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great loss of livelihood to the fishermen and their families. **It is particularly distressing that a senior member of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Dr. Subramanian Swamy has, in a televised media interview on 01.09.2014, stated that it was he who had advised the Sri Lankan Government not to release the boats of the Tamil Nadu fishermen. This statement of Dr. Subramanian Swamy has given rise to resentment and angst not only amongst the fishermen community but also amongst the entire population of Tamil Nadu. I am confident that these are not the official views of your Party or of the Government of India.**

Without their sole means of earning their livelihood, these fishermen are in a despondent state. Denying our fishermen the right to peaceful fishing in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay, to which they have a historical

claim, is fuelling a sense of frustration amongst them. The desperate fishermen are resorting to protests and strikes.

This issue of non-release of 62 fishing boats of our fishermen was highlighted by the Secretary, Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, in the recently held meeting of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Committee on Fisheries held on 29.08.2014 at New Delhi.

I am confident that your Government will find suitable mechanisms to resolve this long pending fishing dispute between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka by retrieving Katchatheevu and restoring the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen in the Palk Bay. The alarmingly increasing frequency of apprehension of our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy is a matter of utmost concern for my Government. An immediate intervention at the highest level is sought to resolve this long standing issue.

I urge you to take this up with the highest authorities of the Sri Lankan Government and ensure the immediate release of the 15 fishermen now apprehended and all the 63 boats in their custody".

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# Sri Lanka's high handedness on retrieving Katchatheevu

## D.O. letter dated 09.09.2014

"This is to bring to your notice a new trend that has emerged in the Sri Lankan Navy's tactics of harassing and intimidating Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu fishing in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay. Of late, the Sri Lankan Navy is targeting fishing boats stranded in mid-sea due to adverse weather conditions or mechanical failure as well as fishing boats that go to the rescue of such fellow fishermen in distress. These boats in distress and Indian fishermen on board are being apprehended and remanded to custody in Sri Lanka. This is a totally inhumane approach and completely against the ethics of maritime search and rescue operations.

In the latest episode one mechanised fishing boat, belonging to Ramanathapuram District with 6 fishermen who set sail for fishing from Rameswaram fishing base on 08.09.2014 and was drifting due to a mechanical snag, has

been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 09.09.2014. I learn that the boat and fishermen have been taken to Thalaimannar in Sri Lanka. Even in the last two instances on 01.09.2014 and 02.09.2014, 15 Indian fishermen were apprehended from boats which were in distress in mid-sea. Two boats sank and the boat which went to their rescue was captured. The 15 fishermen and one boat continue to be in Sri Lankan custody.

I wish to reiterate that the Sri Lankan strategy of keeping the apprehended fishing boats of our fishermen in custody has snatched away the source of meagre livelihood of the poor fishermen and their families and is also fuelling despondency and great unrest amongst the fishermen. The 63 boats of Tamil Nadu fishermen in Sri Lankan custody are deteriorating due to lack of maintenance on a daily basis. With the North East Monsoon due to arrive shortly, these precariously berthed impounded boats will suffer irreparable damage if not released immediately.

These incidents once again highlight the importance of retrieving the Katchatheevu islet. I had challenged the constitutionality of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreements of 1974 and 1976 which unilaterally ceded the islet of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in W.P.(Civil) No. 561/2008, and sought to declare the 1974 and 1976 Agreements as null and void. The stand of the Government of Tamil Nadu is that Katchatheevu has always been a part of India, geographically, culturally and

historically. The permanent solution to this vexatious issue lies in retrieving Indian sovereignty over Katchatheevu and in recognizing the rights of our fishermen to fish in their traditional fishing grounds of the Palk Bay.

May I exhort you to immediately take up the matter with the Sri Lankan Government and arrange for the immediate release of all the 21 fishermen of Tamil Nadu now in Sri Lankan custody including the 6 fishermen apprehended today (09.09.2014) and the immediate release of the 64 impounded boats? I hope the Government of India under your leadership would find a decisive and permanent solution to this sensitive livelihood issue of our fishermen".

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# Seeking help from centre to free fishermen held in Qatar

## D.O. letter dated 23.09.2014

"I write to bring to your kind attention a tragic incident which took place in the seas off the coast of Bahrain and Qatar in which a fisherman Thiru. Karthikeyan S/o. Thiru. Thangarasu from Thiruppalaikudi Village, Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, currently based in Bahrain was shot dead by the Qatar Coast Guard while fishing along with three other persons. The three other fishermen, Thiru. Aiyyappan, Thiru. Raju and Thiru . Samayamuthu, also from Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, have been arrested by the Qatar Coast Guard. These fishermen from Ramanathapuram District in Tamil Nadu were working in Bahrain on contract basis when this unfortunate incident took place in the early hours of 21$^{st}$ September, 2014.

It has been ascertained that these four fishermen, in the course of their fishing activities, inadvertently strayed

into Qatar waters when the Qatar Coast Guard opened fire killing one fisherman and arresting three others. The other three fishermen have been detained in the Doha Jail, Qatar. It is learnt that the body of the deceased fisherman is also in the custody of Qatar authorities.

These poor, innocent fishermen who strayed inadvertently into Qatar waters had gone to Bahrain to earn a meagre livelihood and support their families. The family of the deceased fisherman is shattered and seek the early return of his body. The arrested fishermen are the sole breadwinners of their families and if their immediate release is not secured the fishermen and their families will be put to great financial and mental hardship.

I request you to direct the Indian Embassies in Qatar and Bahrain to take urgent steps to arrange for the transportation of the body of the deceased fisherman Thiru Karthikeyan and also secure the early release of the other three fishermen. I also request you to kindly direct the Indian Embassy at Bahrain to take up this matter with the employer company and to ensure that the terminal monetary benefits due to Thiru. Karthikeyan are released to the family without any delay”.

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# Apprising Prime Minister on detained fishermen's plight

## D.O. letter dated 25.09.2014

"I wish to bring to your notice the pathetic plight of 4 fishermen from Tamil Nadu who were arrested and detained by the Iranian Coast Guard on 22nd September, 2014.

It is reported that four fishermen, namely Thiru Sasikumar (40 yrs) S/o Louis, Thiru. Antony (29 yrs) S/o Soosainayaham, Thiru. Anthony (34 yrs) S/o Samichael and Thiru. Arokiam (30 yrs) S/o Stephen, from Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu were engaged in fishing in Qatar on contract basis. On September 16, 2014, these four fishermen went for fishing in a mechanized fishing boat and in the course of their fishing operations they inadvertently strayed into Iranian waters on September 22, 2014, and were arrested by the Iran Coast Guard.

The four fishermen from Tamil Nadu, who are languishing in a prison on Kish Island in Iran, are the sole

breadwinners of their families and they had gone to Qatar to eke out a humble livelihood. Their prolonged incarceration will severely affect their families and dependents in India.

I request you to kindly personally intervene in the matter and direct the Embassy of India in Teheran to take effective legal steps to secure the immediate release of these poor and innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu".

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# Centre urged to take Positive steps on detained fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 30.09.2014

"Due to the untiring and relentless efforts of our beloved leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma, 76 Indian fishermen languishing in Sri Lankan jails were released by the Sri Lankan court today (30.09.2014). Out of these 76 fishermen, 72 are from Tamil Nadu. No boats have been released. I appreciate the efforts of the Government of India under your leadership in securing the release of fishermen who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy but unfortunately 71 fishing boats of these fishermen have not yet been released by the Sri Lankan Government and are falling apart from disuse there itself. The impending advent of the North East Monsoon mandates their immediate release to prevent further damage and deterioration.

I would like to bring to your notice yet another incident, wherein 4 fishermen in a mechanised fishing boat who set sail for fishing from Rameswaram fishing base of

Ramanathapuram District on 27.09.2014, were drifting due to a technical snag and were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 28.09.2014 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka. The 4 fishermen were produced before the Magistrate's Court, Kayts on 29.09.2014 and have been remanded till 10.10.2014.

In another incident on 29.09.2014, 4 fishing boats from Kottaipattinam fishing base, Pudukkottai District with 16 fishermen ventured into the sea for fishing. While fishing, they were apprehended in the early hours of 30.09.2014 by the Sri Lankan Navy and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

The traditional rights of fishermen from Tamil Nadu to fish in the waters of Palk Bay is continuously being infringed upon by the Sri Lankan Navy. The IMBL itself is a matter that is sub judice in the Supreme Court of India wherein the Government of Tamil Nadu and our beloved leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma in her personal capacity as General Secretary of AIADMK has challenged the unconstitutional ceding away of Katchatheevu by the 1974 and 1976 Agreements.

The Government of Tamil Nadu strongly reiterates the need to restore the traditional rights of our fishermen by annulling the ill-advised Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 urgently. I am confident that your Government will find suitable mechanisms to resolve this

long pending fishing dispute between India and Sri Lanka by retrieving Katchatheevu and restoring the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen.

I request the Government of India to take positive and concrete steps to secure the immediate release of 20 fishermen and 75 boats still in custody of the Sri Lankan authorities".

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# Urgent steps sought for release of 24 fishermen by Sri Lanka

**D.O. letter dated 08.10.2014**

"This is to bring to your notice, one more incident, wherein 4 fishermen in a fishing boat bearing registration No. IND-TN-10-MM-468 who set sail from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District on 6.10.2014 have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. The boat drifted to Delft Island, Sri Lanka and was grounded due to an engine snag following which the 4 fishermen were arrested and handed over to Delft Island Police, by the Sri Lankan Navy.

This new trend of apprehending fishermen in boats that develop mechanical snag by the Sri Lankan Navy is a matter of concern for my Government. An immediate intervention at the highest level is sought to arrest this new trend.

I would like to remind you that 20 fishermen and 75 boats of the fishermen of Tamil Nadu continue to be in

Sri Lankan custody. The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great frustration amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. Without their livelihood base, these fishermen are in a state of despondency. I urge you to take this up with the highest authorities of the Sri Lankan Government and ensure the immediate release of the precariously berthed boats as the impending monsoon poses grave danger to them.

Nearly 10 lakh fisherfolk in Tamil Nadu depend on marine fishing as their only source of livelihood. As our leader, Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had indicated earlier, the Government of Tamil Nadu under her leadership had taken a number of steps towards diversification of their avocation to minimize the pressure on the marine ecosystem. A two pronged approach is necessary at this juncture to solve this chronic problem. One is the financial package that our Leader had requested from the Central Government, which would go a long way in improving the socio economic status of the fishermen. The second is the abrogation of the 1974 and 1976 agreements and restoration of the traditional and historical fishing grounds of the Palk Bay and Katchatheevu which has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by our Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma in her personal capacity and also by the Government of Tamil Nadu in the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India. Denying our fishermen, the right to peaceful fishing in their traditional waters of the

Palk Bay to which they have a historical claim is causing considerable angst amongst the fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu. I request your personal intervention to immediately resolve this long pending issue by retrieving Katchatheevu and restoring the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen as has been demanded by our beloved leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma.

May I request you to instruct the concerned Ministry to take urgent steps to secure the immediate release of 24 fishermen who are languishing in Sri Lankan jails and the release of 75 boats in Sri Lankan custody?”

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# ‘Ensure safety of impounded boats’

## D.O. letter dated 16.10.2014

“I write to you to bring to your notice the alarming situation that has been developing over the past few months and is now seriously threatening the livelihood of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu caused by the vindictive and vengeful action of the Sri Lankan Navy. Our beloved leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had written to you several times indicating that the Sri Lankan Government has been pursuing a devious and sinister strategy of not releasing the apprehended fishing boats in successive incidents where such boats along with Indian fishermen were harassed and arrested while pursuing their peaceful avocation of fishing in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay.

The Government of Tamil Nadu reiterates its firm commitment to the restoration of the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen in the Palk Bay and the retrieval of Katchatheevu which had been an integral part of

India since time immemorial. The Government of India should also not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled issue as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by the Government of Tamil Nadu and our beloved leader Puratchi Thalavi Amma in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

In my letter dated 08.10.2014, I had requested the release of 24 fishermen from Tamil Nadu apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. They continue to be in Sri Lankan custody. In addition, at present 75 boats belonging to the Tamil Nadu fishermen apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy after May, 2014, continue to languish in Sri Lankan custody. The Sri Lankan side has deliberately and deviously hardened their stance and adopted this harsh approach of not releasing boats.

Fishermen Associations have represented that fishermen families are despondent and in desperate straits due to the non-release of boats for a prolonged period. Their livelihood is severely affected and the ensuing Deepavali festival may be bleak and cheerless for them. They requested me to take up the matter of non-release of boats with the Government of India urgently and seek an early resolution to the issue. Their well-founded apprehension is that with the North East monsoon due to hit the

Sri Lankan and Tamil Nadu coast shortly, their impounded boats which have been precariously berthed in the open, exposed to the elements and with no regular maintenance on the Sri Lankan coast, are likely to suffer irretrievable damage if they are not released at once. Even now, it is reported that disuse and lack of maintenance has led to their deterioration. The high velocity winds expected with the monsoon will damage these precariously anchored boats beyond redemption. I therefore urge you to immediately instruct the concerned Ministry to take up the matter of the safe berthing of these 75 boats pending release with the Sri Lankan authorities.

In parallel, the immediate release of these boats must also be taken up. Being deprived of their boats which are their essential means of earning their livelihood has led to considerable loss of income and reduced many fishermen families to a stage of penury, poverty and to a state of utter despondency. I implore you to kindly intervene in the matter personally and ensure the immediate release of the 75 Indian fishing boats that are still in Sri Lankan custody".

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# Steps demanded to save death row fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 30.10.2014

"The people of Tamil Nadu are shocked and deeply grieved to learn of the judgement of the Colombo High Court delivered today (30.10.2014), convicting and sentencing 5 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu to death, on charges of transferring narcotics. On behalf the people of Tamil Nadu, I strongly condemn the unjust conviction meted out to the 5 Indian fishermen from Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu - Emerson, Agastas, Wilson, Prasath and Langlet. The Government of Tamil Nadu has consistently insisted that these 5 fishermen were innocent and that the case has been foisted on them and also that the evidence against the fishermen in the court is a fabrication. These 5 fishermen set out to fish from Rameswaram on 28.11.2011, when they were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on the allegation of possession of narcotics.

My leader, Puratchi Thalavi Amma has written numerous times to both you and your predecessor in the last three years regarding this case. Based on the directions of my Leader, the case has also been taken up in several Inter-Ministerial and Joint Working Group meetings. This issue has also figured prominently in the fishermen level talks.

The Government of Tamil Nadu had also sanctioned special assistance to pay for the legal fees of defending these 5 fishermen. Further, the Government of Tamil Nadu has sanctioned special livelihood assistance to the families of the 5 fishermen.

Based on Government of Tamil Nadu's insistence, the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka had taken up this issue with the Sri Lankan authorities and consistently argued that these are bonafide fishermen with no record of involvement in drug related activities. There was considerable hope that the fishermen would be released based on the records submitted by the Indian side. Based on the close monitoring of this case by the Government of Tamil Nadu, the Indian side had been given hope that in each successive hearing there was a strong prospect of discharge of the fishermen from the case and their release.

In these circumstances, the conviction of these fishermen and the award of death penalty is particularly shocking and unexpected. The manner in which the entire trial was conducted and the orders delayed, gives rise to serious doubts as to whether the fishermen received a fair trial. This is particularly so since, in earlier cases of alleged drug trafficking, where the court found the accused guilty the only penalty levied was a fine. The present case of 5 fishermen was under hearing in Jaffna when the Sri Lankan police filed the charge sheet in the Colombo Court and transferred the case abruptly. Thereafter, the trial was held in the Fourth Bench of the Colombo High Court.

Given all these circumstances, the death sentence against the 5 fishermen has greatly incensed not only the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu but all sections of society. It is quite apparent that these bonafide and innocent fishermen have not received a fair trial and have become the victims of a hidden agenda.

It is the paramount duty of the Government of India to protect the life and liberty of 5 of its innocent citizens who are being deprived of their rights in an apparently unjust and unfair manner. I request you to immediately take up the matter with the highest authorities in Sri Lanka to ensure that the lives of the 5 innocent Indian fishermen are saved and they are released to return home at the earliest.

I also request you to direct the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka to set in motion the legal procedure for appeal within the statutory period in the appropriate appellate forum. Since the Government of Tamil Nadu will continue to meet the entire legal costs of this case, the Indian High Commission may be instructed not to spare any effort including, securing the best legal counsel and support for the effective defence of the 5 fishermen. Failure to take immediate decisive action in this case and secure justice for the 5 fishermen will greatly inflame the already bruised emotions amongst the people of Tamil Nadu".

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## ‘Save Tamil Nadu Fishermen suffering in Saudi Arabia’

**D.O. letter dated 31.10.2014**

“I write to bring to your attention the pathetic plight of 22 fishermen who had gone to Saudi Arabia to work for a fishing company through an agent last year. The company is based in Jubail, Saudi Arabia. Of these fishermen, 12 are from Nagapattinam District, one from Cuddalore District and 3 from Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu. The remaining 6 are from Karaikkal District of Puducherry.

It appears that these fishermen are being forced to endure harsh working conditions and they are being physically abused and tortured. Despite their plea to be repatriated to India, as they are unable to bear the hardship, their employer is refusing to pay heed. These fishermen have not even been paid their wages as per the contractual terms. The family members of these poor fishermen have requested the Government of Tamil Nadu to intervene and ensure their safe return to India.

I request you to kindly intervene in the matter and direct the Embassy of India in Saudi Arabia to take immediate steps to contact the 22 fishermen and ascertain their well being. The Embassy of India may also be directed to contact the authorities in Saudi Arabia to ensure that the dues to these poor fishermen are settled immediately by the company in which they were employed. The Embassy of India may also be directed to provide all assistance to enable these fishermen to return home safely" .

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# Another incident of arrest of fishermen: Central intervention sought for release

## D.O. letter dated 24.11.2014

"I write to bring to your notice, one more incident, in which 14 fishermen in three fishing boats bearing registration Nos. IND-TN-06-MM-595, IND-TN-06-MM-625 and IND-TN-10-MM-384, who set sail from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District and Jagathapattinam fishing base of Pudukkottai District on 23.11.2014 have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. The boats and fishermen have been taken to Kangesanthurai in Sri Lanka and are under detention.

It is unfortunate that this incident has taken place after the recent positive development in which 5 fishermen who were sentenced to death in a foisted case of transporting narcotic substances were released on 20.11.2014. You are aware that the Government of Tamil Nadu on the directions of my Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had

been relentlessly raising the issue of the release of these 5 fishermen with the Government of India ever since their arrest in 2011. On the instructions of my Leader the State Government had also funded the entire legal costs of the defence of these five fishermen and also supported their families throughout this period with financial grants. As soon as information on the award of death penalty to these 5 fishermen was received on 30.10.2014, the Government of Tamil Nadu requested you to immediately take up the matter with the highest authorities in Sri Lanka to ensure that the lives of the 5 innocent Indian fishermen are saved and they are released to return home at the earliest. The Government of India was also requested to direct the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka to set in motion the legal procedure for appeal and secure the best legal counsel and support for the effective defence of the 5 fishermen. The Government of Tamil Nadu also sanctioned Rs. 20 lakh towards the legal costs for the defence of the 5 fishermen.

Based on the request of the Government of Tamil Nadu you had personally intervened in the matter and the 5 fishermen were released on 20.11.2014. I thank you for your timely intervention.

However, the latest incident which occurred on 23.11.2014 shows that the Sri Lankan authorities have resorted to their familiar tactics of harassing and

intimidating Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu while they fish in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay. May I remind you that 24 fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy nearly 2 months ago are still in custody, apart from the 14 fishermen apprehended, yesterday (23.11.2014).

Further the devious and sinister strategy of the Sri Lankan authorities, which our Beloved Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had already brought to your notice, of not releasing the fishing boats which were apprehended in successive incidents wherein Indian fishermen were harassed and arrested while pursuing their peaceful avocation of fishing, has now very seriously impacted the livelihood of Indian fishermen and their families in Tamil Nadu. 75 fishing boats from Tamil Nadu continue to be in Sri Lankan custody apart from the 3 boats which were apprehended on 23.11.2014.

The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great frustration amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. Without their livelihood base, these fishermen are in a state of despondency. I urge you to take this up with the highest authorities of the Sri Lankan Government and ensure the immediate release of the precariously berthed boats which continue to suffer great damage in the North-East Monsoon.

Nearly 10 lakh fisherfolk in Tamil Nadu depend on marine fishing as their only source of livelihood. As our beloved Leader, Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had indicated earlier, the Government of Tamil Nadu under her leadership had taken a number of steps towards diversification of their avocation to minimize the pressure on the marine ecosystem. A two pronged approach is necessary at this juncture to solve this chronic problem. One is sanction of the financial package of Rs.1,520 crore and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging, that our Leader had requested from the Central Government, which would go a long way in improving the socio economic status of the fishermen. The second is the abrogation of the 1974 and 1976 agreements and retrieval of Katchatheevu as well as restoration of the traditional and historical fishing grounds of the Palk Bay to the Tamil Nadu fishermen. The ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by our Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma in her personal capacity and also by the Government of Tamil Nadu in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. Denying our fishermen, the right to peaceful fishing in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay to which they have a historical claim is causing considerable angst amongst the fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu. I request your personal intervention to immediately resolve this long pending issue by retrieving

Katchatheevu and restoring the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen as has been demanded by our beloved Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma.

May I request you to instruct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter immediately and ensure the prompt release of the 38 fishermen, including the 14 detained yesterday, who are languishing in Sri Lankan jails and the release of 78 boats currently in Sri Lankan custody?"

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# Long-term solution to problems of fishermen sought

## D.O. letter dated 10.12.2014

"I write to bring to your kind notice, yet another incident, in which 14 fishermen in two fishing boats bearing registration Nos. IND-TN-06-MM-2524 and IND-TN-06-MM-567 who set sail from Nagapattinam fishing base of Nagapattinam District on 09.12.2014 have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. Another 14 Tamil Nadu fishermen who were on board a fishing boat from Karaikal base of Pudhucherry were also apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. The boats and fishermen have been taken to Kangesanthurai in Sri Lanka and are in custody.

It is unfortunate that this incident has taken place immediately after the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly in an unanimous Resolution passed on 05.12.2014, urged the Central Government to secure the immediate release of 38 Tamil Nadu fishermen languishing in Sri Lankan Jails as well as to take necessary action for the release of 79 fishing boats which have been seized

by the Sri Lankan authorities. The livelihood of our fishermen is being threatened by the Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing their boats. Many of these boats have been in custody and unused and without any maintenance for over 6 months, causing huge damage and loss. My Beloved Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had written to you several times indicating that the Sri Lankan Government has been pursuing a devious and sinister strategy of not releasing the apprehended fishing boats in successive incidents where Indian fishermen are harassed and arrested while pursuing their peaceful avocation of fishing in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay.

At this juncture, I would like to point out that the Chief Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu in his letter dated 06.12.2014, had replied to the Foreign Secretary, Government of India stating that if the Sri Lankan side initiates the release of all the Tamil Nadu fishermen along with their fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody, the Government of Tamil Nadu will also initiate necessary steps for the release of the Sri Lankan fishermen along with their fishing boats. But this latest episode of arrest of Tamil Nadu fishermen and their boats raises apprehensions about the true intention of the Sri Lankan Government regarding the release of Tamil Nadu fishermen and their boats.

The Government of Tamil Nadu reiterates its firm commitment to the restoration of the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen in the Palk Bay and the retrieval

of Katchatheevu which had been an integral part of India since time immemorial. The Government of India should also not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by the Government of Tamil Nadu and my Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma in her personal capacity in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

I also wish to recall that my Beloved Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had already requested a Comprehensive Special Package for Diversification of Fisheries at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging as part of the Memorandum presented to you on 3rd June, 2014. An early approval of the Comprehensive Special Package for Diversification of Fisheries by Government of India would go a long way in finding a long term solution to this sensitive issue.

I, therefore, request your urgent intervention for finding a long term solution to this issue which includes the retrieval of Katchatheevu and sanction of the requisite financial package. I also urge you to secure the immediate release of the 66 fishermen who are in the custody of the Sri Lankan authorities as well as 81 fishing boats, including the 28 fishermen and two fishing boats apprehended on 9.12.2014".

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# 'Intervene to free 24 fishermen arrested by Bangladesh Navy'

## D.O. letter dated 11.12.2014

"I wish to bring to your notice the plight of 24 fishermen from Kanniyakumari District in Tamil Nadu who were arrested by the Bangladesh Navy on 9.12.2014.

It is reported that the 24 fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu engaged as fishing labourers on a share basis, went for deep sea fishing in three boats from Bettuagad near Calcutta in West Bengal on 17th November, 2014. These 24 innocent fishermen have been arrested by the Bangladesh Navy for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line on 09.12.2014.

These innocent fishermen are the sole breadwinners of their families and engage in deep sea fishing in order to eke out a meagre livelihood. Their arrest and detention will severely affect their families and dependants in Tamil Nadu.

Hence, I request you to kindly direct the officials of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India to co-ordinate with the High Commission of India, in Dhaka, Bangladesh and intervene at the diplomatic level to secure the immediate release of these 24 poor fishermen from Tamil Nadu".

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## ‘Secure release of fishermen, boats’

### D.O. letter dated 16.12.2014

“The Government of India through two letters written by the Foreign Secretary dated 01.12.2014 and 11.12.2014 to the Chief Secretary, Government of Tamilnadu requested the Government of Tamil Nadu to release the 30 Sri Lankan fishermen and their fishing boats in custody in Tamil Nadu in order to pave the way for the release of 66 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu and 81 fishing boats currently in Sri Lankan custody.

As you are aware, My Beloved Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma has consistently taken up the issue of the release of the Tamil Nadu fishermen and specifically of the fishing boats which have been detained since June, 2014 leading to their deterioration in the South-West and North-East monsoon periods.

In the past, Tamil Nadu had always co-operated with the Government of India to ensure that there was a

parallel and simultaneous release of fishermen of both the Indian and Sri Lankan sides. However, on this occasion the Government of India is insisting on the Government of Tamil Nadu initiating the process of release of the Sri Lankan fishermen and their boats.

Ordinarily, we would have expected the Government of India to have supported the Government of Tamil Nadu's stand and prevailed upon the Sri Lankan Government to arrange a simultaneous release of fishermen and their boats. It now appears that the Government of India has ruled out this possibility. In these circumstances, and in view of the approaching Christmas festival, in a spirit of accommodation and magnanimity and as a humanitarian gesture, the Government of Tamil Nadu is prepared to release the 30 Sri Lankan fishermen and their 19 boats currently in custody in Tamil Nadu on 22.12.2014, after completion of formalities, so that they can return home and celebrate Christmas with their families. I request you to ensure that the Government of Sri Lanka also releases the 66 Tamil Nadu fishermen and their 81 boats which are in the custody of Sri Lanka at the same time so that they can also return home in time for Christmas".

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# Tamil Nadu reiterates demand for release of fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 20.12.2014

"You would recall that I had written to you on 16.12.2014, indicating that, in view of the approaching Christmas festival, in a spirit of accommodation and magnanimity and as a humanitarian gesture, the Government of Tamil Nadu is prepared to release the 30 Sri Lankan fishermen and their 19 boats currently in custody in Tamil Nadu on 22.12.2014, after completion of formalities, so that they can return home and celebrate Christmas with their families. I had also requested you to ensure that the Government of Sri Lanka also releases the 66 Tamil Nadu fishermen and their 81 boats which are in the custody of Sri Lanka at the same time so that they can also return home in time for Christmas.

We understand from a letter dated 19.12.2014 received from the Ministry of External Affairs that although the offer of the Government of Tamil Nadu was conveyed

to the Government of Sri Lanka, the Government of Sri Lanka is agreeable only to release 66 Indian fishermen but not the boats. As you would recall, my respected Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma has consistently taken up the issue of the release of the fishing boats which have been detained since June, 2014, leading to their deterioration in the South-West and North-East monsoon periods. Hence it is disappointing to learn that the Sri Lankan Government is unwilling to release the boats of the Tamil Nadu fishermen. It only confirms what my respected Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had always maintained, that the Government of Sri Lanka is pursuing a sinister strategy of depriving fishermen families in Tamil Nadu of their source of livelihood. I urge you to immediately take up once again the issue of release of the fishing boats of our fishermen.

However, given the approaching Christmas festival, in a spirit of generosity and magnanimity, the Government of Tamil Nadu will go ahead with the release of all the 30 fishermen from Sri Lanka on 22.12.2014. We expect that the Government of India will ensure that the 66 fishermen from Tamil Nadu in Sri Lankan custody will also return home well in time for Christmas”.

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# Release sought of 29 fishermen held by Sri Lankan Navy

**D.O. letter dated 27.02.2015**

I write to bring to your notice, an incident of apprehension of fishermen from Tamil Nadu, in which 29 fishermen and three fishing boats bearing registration Nos. IND-TN-06-MM-44, IND-TN-06-MM-743 and IND-TN-08-MM-1306 who set sail -on 24.2.2015, have been apprehended on 26.2.2015 by the Sri Lankan Navy and are under detention.

It is unfortunate that this incident has taken place even after the change in regime in Sri Lanka. In a situation where the untiring efforts towards the welfare and safety of Tamil Nadu fishermen relentlessly pursued by my revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma were bearing fruit, it is unfortunate that the festive mood on the eve of St. Antony's Festival in Katchatheevu, has been completely vitiated by the actions of the Sri Lankan Navy which has apprehended 29 fishermen and their three fishing boats.

The fishermen in Tamil Nadu are also eagerly awaiting the return of the 81 fishing boats which were in Sri Lankan custody for a long time and have been recently released due to the concerted efforts of my revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma and the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Nearly 10 lakh fisherfolk in Tamil Nadu depend on marine fishing as their only source of livelihood. As our revered Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had indicated earlier, the Government of Tamil Nadu under her leadership had taken a number of steps towards diversification of their avocation to minimize the pressure on the marine ecosystem. A two pronged approach is necessary at this juncture to solve this chronic problem. One is sanction of the financial package of Rs.1520 crores and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crores per annum for maintenance dredging, that our Leader had requested from the Central Government, which would go a long way in improving the socio economic status of the fishermen. The second is the abrogation of the 1974 and 1976 agreements and retrieval of Katchatheevu as well as restoration of the traditional and historical fishing grounds of the Palk Bay to the Tamil Nadu fishermen. The ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by our Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma in her personal

capacity and also by the Government of Tamil Nadu in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

May I request you to instruct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter immediately and ensure the prompt release of the 29 fishermen from Tamil Nadu and their 3 boats from Sri Lankan custody?

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# ‘MEA must forthwith take up release of Indian fishermen with Sri Lanka’

## D.O. letter dated 22.03.2015

As you are aware, my revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma, in view of the sentiments and desire of the fishermen community of Tamil Nadu to hold talks with the fishermen of Sri Lanka to sort out the day to day issues faced by them while fishing in the Palk Bay and in the interest of keeping a channel of communication open between the fishermen communities of both countries, had facilitated holding fishermen level talks between fishermen associations of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. The next round of talks is scheduled to be held in Chennai on 24.3.2015. The Sri Lankan fishermen delegation is programmed to arrive in Chennai in the morning of 23.3.2015 (Monday).

At a time when all the groundwork for the talks has been completed and there was eager anticipation amongst the fishermen community that these talks could lead to a significant breakthrough in a long-pending and vexatious

issue, it is most disconcerting and shocking to learn that the Sri Lankan Navy has apprehended and arrested 54 innocent fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu and their 10 boats in two separate incidents which took place in the early hours of 22.3.2015 when the fishermen were engaged in their peaceful avocation in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay. 33 fishermen in 5 boats belonging to Rameswaram fishing base in Ramanathapuram District and 21 fishermen in 5 boats belonging to Jagathapattinam in Pudukottai District who set sail on 21.3.2015, were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy and have been remanded up to 27.3.2015 and 2.4.2015 respectively.

These latest incidents, coming as they do on the eve of the fishermen level talks, constitute an extremely unfortunate development. The unprovoked and belligerent action has caused tremendous anxiety and agitation amongst the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu. The assiduous and decisive steps being taken by the Government of Tamil Nadu under the guidance of my revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma to defuse the tense situation prevailing in the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu and to create a conducive and accommodative atmosphere for the smooth conduct of bilateral fishermen level talks, could be undermined by this action of the Sri Lankan authorities.

This latest incident definitely requires your personal intervention and we exhort you to take concrete and

decisive action to ensure the immediate release of the 54 apprehended fishermen and their 10 boats. I request you to instruct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan Government forthwith and impress upon the Sri Lankan authorities to arrange for the immediate release of our fishermen and their boats.

I wish to state that, only when all the apprehended fishermen in Sri Lankan custody and their boats are released would the talks be meaningful and conducted in a conducive atmosphere.

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## Central sanction sought for financial package to boost fishermen's lives

**D.O. letter dated 04.04.2015**

I write to bring to your notice, yet another incident of apprehension of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, in which 37 fishermen in 5 mechanised fishing boats who set sail from Nagapattinam fishing base of Nagapattinam District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 3.4.2015. The boats and fishermen have been taken to Kangesanthurai in Sri Lanka and the fishermen have been remanded to judicial custody.

It is unfortunate that this incident has taken place immediately after the 3rd round of fishermen level talks which were recently held at Chennai on 24.3.2015. As you are aware, my revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma, in view of the sentiments and desire of the fishermen community of Tamil Nadu to hold talks with the fishermen of Sri Lanka to sort out the day to day issues faced by them while fishing in the Palk Bay and in the interest of keeping

a channel of communication open between the fishermen communities of both countries, had commenced holding of fishermen level talks between fishermen associations of

Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. The 3rd round of fishermen level talks between the fishermen of both the countries which was held on 24.3.2015 went on smoothly and in a conducive atmosphere. The fishermen on both sides were confident that the talks would give a positive momentum towards finding a permanent solution to their fishing issues.

At a time when we were hopeful that a pragmatic and permanent solution to this issue would emerge as a result of the fishermen level talks, it is disconcerting to read media reports quoting senior Sri Lankan leaders, stating inter alia that the Sri Lankan Navy would be directed to apprehend Indian fishermen fishing in their traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay. We are concerned that this most recent act of the Sri Lankan Navy will be seen in the light of these statements and will again heighten the anxiety and unrest in the minds of our fishermen and vitiate the atmosphere of goodwill which was generated as a result of the fishermen level talks. A firm, clear, unequivocal and unambiguous message should be sent out by the Government of India to the Sri Lankan side to ensure that these trends are reversed and the livelihood of the poor and innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu who are engaged in their traditional occupation and fish in their traditional waters are protected.

The statements and the most recent incident yet again highlight the importance of retrieving the Katchatheevu islet and abrogation of the 1974 and 1976 agreements thereby restoring the traditional and historical fishing grounds of the Palk Bay to the Tamil Nadu fishermen. The ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma in her personal capacity and also by the Government of Tamil Nadu in the Supreme Court of India.

You are also aware that under the guidance of our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma, the Government of Tamil Nadu has the greatest concern for the conservation of the marine ecosystem and does not support unsustainable practices. We have taken a number of steps to minimize the pressure on the marine ecosystem. Our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had requested in the Memorandum presented to you on 3.6.2014, for sanction of a financial package of Rs.1520 crores and recurring grant of Rs.10 crores which would go a long way in improving the socio economic status of the fishermen from the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu. I strongly urge you to direct the concerned Ministries to sanction the package at the earliest. Early action on the permanent solution for the Katchatheevu problem and long term diversification measures must be initiated.

I request that this latest incident of apprehension of our fishermen be taken up at the highest diplomatic level. It should be ensured that this unfortunate incident receives the much needed priority attention that it deserves and the Government of India should take necessary steps to ensure the safety and security of our fishermen. The Government of India should secure the immediate release of the 37 fishermen and the 18 boats in Sri Lankan custody, including the 5 mechanised boats which were apprehended on 3.4.2015.

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# New Central guidelines on fishing 'illegal, set dangerous precedent'

## D.O. letter dated 03.05.2015

"I wish to bring to your kind attention a serious issue relating to two recent decisions of the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India that could in effect lead to swamping by foreign fishing vessels in India's Exclusive Economic Zone and also increase the regulatory burden on domestic fishing fleets.

The new Deep Sea Fishing Guidelines issued by the Department of Animal Husbandry Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture on 12th November, 2014, have changed the definition of 'Deep Sea Fishing Vessels' reducing the Over All Length (OAL) to 15 metres instead of the OAL of 20 metres as per the original guidelines issued in 2004 and continued in the guidelines issued in 2013. Further, the definition of 'Operator' has been expanded to include "joint ventures" with up to 49% foreign equity. This definition also includes now 'Any Indian Citizen'.

The procedure for engaging foreign crews has also been made easier with the removal of the requirement for prior clearance from Government of India. Further, as per a Public Notice issued on 28th November, 2014, by the Department of Animal Husbandry Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, the system of issuing Letters of Permission (LOP) has been expanded for Deep Sea Fishing Vessels to conduct fishing in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which will operate for all vessels with an OAL of 15 metres and above. Thus even the existing Indian coastal fishing vessels which are between an OAL of 15 metres and 20 metres will now be required to obtain a LOP which was not required earlier.

The new Guidelines issued by the Government of India will adversely affect the local fishermen in Tamil Nadu because out of the 5,500 Mechanised fishing boats in Tamil Nadu more than 80% of the boats are above 15 metres OAL and are engaged in near shore fishing just beyond the territorial waters of India. Obtaining LOPs from the Government of India and voyage clearances from the Indian Coast Guard for each fishing voyage is extremely impractical.

In this connection, I also wish to point out that the new Guidelines are per se illegal because they are contrary to the existing laws on the subject. As per Section 7(5) of the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic

Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act 1976, a citizen of India need not get any licence or letter of authority from the Central Government for fishing in the EEZ. The rights granted to an Indian citizen by an Act of Parliament cannot be abrogated by an Executive Order of the Government.

Even an independent agency like the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) categorizes 'coastal fisheries' as fisheries carried out by vessels having an overall length of less than 24 meters and operating within the EEZ of its flag state.

It is seen from the consolidated FDI policy published by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India that no foreign investment is permitted in the Fisheries sector. Therefore, the Notification dated 12.11.2014, which brings within the ambit of the operator, a joint venture company with at least 51% Indian equity is not in conformity with the consolidated FDI Policy Circular, 2014.

The new Guidelines have led to strong protests from the fishermen community across India including Tamil Nadu. The stance of the Government of Tamil Nadu, based on our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma's consistent re-iteration, is that the rights of Indian citizens and fishermen to fish in India's Exclusive Economic Zone should not be unnecessarily restricted. The Government

of Tamil Nadu reiterates its stand that all vessels below an OAL of 20 metres owned by fishermen should be given free access to the Indian EEZ whether they are registered under the State Marine Fishing Regulation Act or by other approved agencies.

The system now proposed to be applied by the Government of India needlessly promotes an LOP regime which has proved to be unsuccessful at the cost of domestic fishermen. In fact, a careful reading of the Report of the Expert Committee headed by Dr. B. Meenakumari reveals that the final recommendations do not automatically flow from the data and analysis contained in the Report. To quote from the position statement of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) on the Expert Committee Report, “the Thoothoor fishermen of Kanniyakumari District of Tamil Nadu are harvesting approximately 45,000 mt annually from the deep sea region, whereas, the vessels operating under Letter of Permission (LOP) report an annual catch of 1,900 mt as per the data presented in the Expert committee report”. This not only depicts the failure of the LOP scheme in exploiting the deep sea resources but also clearly indicates that our fishermen have attained the capacity and skill to venture into the deep sea and exploit the country’s deep sea resources.

The new guidelines not only restrict the open access of our fishermen in the EEZ, but also set a dangerous

precedent of allowing foreign vessels of more than 15 metres OAL under LOPs to compete with our fishermen for resources which need to be conserved for utilisation by our Nation and its citizens. The Government of Tamil Nadu under the visionary guidance of our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma, has initiated various schemes and training programmes so that the Tamil Nadu fishermen acquire international standard capabilities for undertaking deep sea fishing, including the provision of 50% subsidy assistance up to Rs.30 lakh to our fishermen for exploiting the untapped deep sea fishery resources. Hence allowing LOP vessels would adversely tilt the balance against our fishermen.

In view of the above, I request you to instruct the Department of Animal Husbandry Dairying and Fisheries to withdraw its order dated 12th November, 2014.

I also urge the Government of India not to issue any fresh guidelines for fishing operations in India till a new Fisheries Act is enacted. Before the Bill for the new Act is introduced in Parliament, this should be discussed with the Ministries in charge of Fisheries of the coastal States and a consensus on the bill arrived at.

In the above context, I request the Government of India:-

- To summarily reject the recommendations of the Expert Committee on Comprehensive Review of

Deep Sea Fishing Policy and Guidelines under the Chairpersonship of Dr. B. Meenakumari, DDG, ICAR as it contains recommendations which are detrimental to the welfare and livelihood propositions of our fishermen. The recommendations are not based on the data and analysis made in the report itself but are alien and extraneous to this.

- To rescind the Guidelines on Deep Sea Fishing issued on 12th November, 2014, and the Public Notice issued on 28th November, 2014, allowing the foreign fishing vessels under LOP in the Indian EEZ in order to fully protect the interests of our fishermen.

- No permission should be afforded to foreign fishing vessels or engagement of foreign crew under the LOP mechanism or through any other mechanism to fish in India's EEZ.

- No joint venture or any other form of agreement with a foreign individual or company should be permitted for undertaking deep sea fishing in India's EEZ.

- Protect and preserve the fishery resources in our EEZ for our artisanal fishing community which is now gearing up to exploit the untapped resources.

- Clearly define fishing vessels of length below 24 metres OAL as coastal fishing vessels and fishing vessels of length 24 metres OAL and above as Deep Sea Fishing Vessel (DSFV).

- The coastal fishing vessels of length below 24 metres OAL owned by our fishermen should be given open access in the Indian EEZ as provided under Section 7(5) of the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act 1976, which provides to Indian citizens the freedom to fish in India's EEZ. The operation of such coastal fishing vessels belonging to Tamil Nadu fishermen may be regulated under the Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act 1983.

- The Government of India should delegate powers to regulate fishing by vessels of 24 metres OAL and above to the Maritime States.

- The Government of India should consider developing specialised infrastructure for landing of Deep Sea Fishing Vessels, safe berthing, reception and handling of high valued deep sea catch (like cold chain from harvest till consumption) to deliver premium quality fish to fetch premium value in the domestic and international markets.

I request you to direct the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries to issue appropriate orders on the above lines. I sincerely hope that the Government of India will accord top most priority to this sensitive livelihood issue of our fishermen.

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# ‘Take urgent steps to bring fisherman’s body from Saudi’

**D.O. letter dated 31.05.2015**

“**I** write to bring to your attention a tragic incident which occurred on the high seas off the coast of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in which a fisherman named Thiru. S. Mathi Valan, S/o Siluvai, aged 45, hailing from Pozhikarai Fishing Village of Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, and currently based in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was shot dead by unidentified persons while fishing along with seven other fishermen.

They had reportedly left the fishing base of Jubail, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on 29.05.2015 in the morning and were engaged in fishing in a fishing vessel “Subial Surkey” (Boat No: A 8203) owned by Mr. Mohammed Mubarak Bahuth of Saudi Arabia when this tragic incident happened. The seven other fishermen are also from Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. The body of the deceased fisherman is now reportedly kept in a

Government Hospital in Saudi Arabia. These fishermen from Kanniyakumari District in Tamil Nadu were working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on contract basis when this unfortunate incident took place.

These poor and innocent fishermen who had gone to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as fishing labourers on contract were eking out their meagre livelihood to support their families back in India. The family of the deceased fisherman is traumatized by the loss of their sole bread winner and seeks the early return of his body. The sudden demise of the fisherman and the tragic circumstances surrounding his death have put his family to great financial and mental hardship.

I request you to direct the Indian Embassy at Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to take urgent steps to arrange for the transportation of the body of the deceased fisherman Thiru S. Mathi Valan, back to Tamil Nadu, at the earliest. I also request you to kindly direct the officials of the Indian Embassy to take up this matter with the employer and to ensure that the terminal monetary benefits due to Thiru S. Mathi Valan are released to his family, without delay.

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# Chief Minister wants Central nod to fisheries proposals seeks release of fishermen arrested by Sri Lanka

## D.O. letter dated 02.06.2015

**"I** write with a deep sense of anguish that, right at the beginning of the fishing season on 1st June, after a 45 day fishing ban, 14 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, along with their 3 fishing boats, have been apprehended and detained by the Sri Lankan Navy. It has been reported that three Mechanized Fishing Boats which set sail for fishing on 01.06.2015, from the Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District with 14 fishermen on board, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 1st June, 2015, and have been taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka.

Further, as you are aware, as on date, 18 boats belonging to our fishermen still continue to be in Sri Lankan custody. I would like to specifically point out that of the 80 boats impounded since June, 2014, 16 boats were completely ruined beyond recovery and could not be salvaged. Boats

and fishing gear which are essential for the poor fishermen to earn their livelihood are deliberately not released by the Sri Lankan authorities while releasing fishermen. Long periods of disuse condemn the boats and equipment to ruin and the poor fishermen are subjected to a huge permanent loss.

In this context, this latest apprehension of innocent and unarmed Tamil Nadu fishermen with a motive to intimidating and preventing them from venturing into their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay and in the vicinity of Katchatheevu, which has always been a part of the traditional fishing area of our fishermen, adds to the immense frustration that has built up among the fishermen community of Tamil Nadu.

My Government strongly believes that the unconstitutional Indo-Sri Lankan Agreements of 1974 and 1976 should be nullified and the traditional rights of our fishermen restored at the earliest. I would like to reiterate that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. I had personally filed W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008, in which the Government of Tamil Nadu had also subsequently impleaded itself. The main prayer

before the Supreme Court is to declare the 1974 and 1976 agreements along with the Executive Order of 1976 as null and void in the absence of the required mandatory Constitutional amendment, and to retrieve Katchatheevu for India. Our stand is that Katchatheevu has always been a part of India, geographically, culturally and historically and needs to be retrieved, keeping in view the livelihood interests and security of lakhs of Indian fishermen.

My Government has taken many steps towards diversification of fishing activities amongst the Palk Bay fishing communities, including the provision of subsidy assistance for purchasing deep sea tuna long liners and promoting use of gill nets. We have also proposed the development of fishing harbours with fish landing facilities at Mookkaiyur and Rameswaram in Ramanathapuram District. The above steps would reduce the pressure on the Palk Bay. These proposals were included in the Memorandum I presented to you on 03.06.2014 requesting sanction of a financial package of Rs.1,520 crore and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging. The detailed project reports for many of the components of this package have been submitted by the Government of Tamil Nadu to the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, and are awaiting clearance. I would also like to point out that the decision of the Government of India on the Meenakumari Report which was placed in the Lok Sabha has not been given effect to, by rescinding

the Notification dated 12th November, 2014, issued by the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India.

We have also encouraged fishermen level talks so that a sustainable and permanent solution to the issue through bilateral talks is worked out. It is unfortunate that despite the Government of Tamil Nadu taking a positive approach and helping to facilitate bi-lateral level talks, the abduction of innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu continues unabated.

A permanent solution to this problem must be found by a decisive initiative by the Government of India. A time bound action plan alongside a strong and robust diplomatic thrust must be put in place to achieve a long-term, permanent solution to this vexatious problem which is affecting the livelihood of lakhs of our fishermen from Tamil Nadu.

I urge your immediate personal intervention in this issue and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities to secure the immediate release of the 14 fishermen who were apprehended on 01.06.2015 and their 3 fishing boats along with the 18 fishing boats which are already in Sri Lankan custody."

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# PM's personal intervention sought for immediate release of fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 21.06.2015

"This is to bring to your notice one more unfortunate incident in which 17 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, along with their 2 fishing boats, have been apprehended and detained by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is reported that two Mechanized Fishing Boats set sail on 19.06.2015, from the Nagapattinam fishing base in Nagapattinam District with 17 fishermen on board, and while they were fishing in their traditional fishing waters, they were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 20th June, 2015. The boats and the fishermen have been taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

The recurring instances of apprehension of our fishermen while they are engaged in their peaceful avocation of fishing in their traditional fishing waters in the high seas in the Palk Bay, by the Sri Lankan Navy and their prolonged detention is causing great unrest amongst

the fishermen community across the State. Further, the Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of the fishermen is causing great long term economic loss to the poor fishermen whose only means of livelihood is being snatched away. 18 fishing boats of Tamil Nadu fishermen continue to be in Sri Lankan custody for more than 3 months and in addition, 14 fishermen along with their 3 boats apprehended on June 1st, 2015, are yet to be released.

These arrests vitiate the congenial atmosphere in which the Government of Tamil Nadu facilitated three rounds of bilateral fishermen level talks in Chennai on January 27th, 2014, in Colombo on May 12th, 2014, and again in Chennai on March 24th, 2015.

The unconstitutional agreements of 1974 and 1976 of the Union Government, which unilaterally ceded the islet of Katchatheevu, is depriving our fishermen of their traditional and historic right of fishing in their traditional waters. I have challenged the ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka in my personal capacity, in the Supreme Court, on extremely valid and legal grounds, and the Government of Tamil Nadu has also subsequently impleaded itself in the Petition.

In the Memorandum I had presented to you on 03.06.2014, I had outlined some of the measures for a permanent solution to this vexatious problem, including the retrieval of the Islet of Katchatheevu, and measures to

diversify fishing activity from the shallow Palk Bay and near shore waters to the under-exploited oceanic waters, by sanctioning a financial package of Rs.1,520 crore and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging. We are yet to receive a favourable response to these issues.

In the meantime, I urge your personal intervention in the matter and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities at the highest level to secure the immediate release of 31 apprehended fishermen and their 23 fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody including the 17 fishermen and 2 fishing boats apprehended on 20th June, 2015. ”

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## Help sought to bring back body of fisherman shot off Bahrain coast

### D.O. letter dated 09.08.2015

**"I** write to bring to your attention a tragic incident which occurred on the high seas off the coast of Bahrain in which a fisherman named Thiru Antony Arul Anish, S/o Androse, aged 21, hailing from Enayamputhenthurai Fishing Village of Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, and working as a contract labourer in a fishing company based at Qatar was shot dead by sea pirates while fishing along with five other fishermen.

The fishermen had reportedly left the fishing base of Qatar in the early hours of 06.08.2015. After being shot at by sea pirates, the Bahrain Coast Guard airlifted the injured fisherman to a Bahrain Hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries. The body of the deceased fisherman is now reportedly kept at a hospital in Bahrain.

This poor and innocent fisherman who had gone to Qatar as a fishing labourer on contract was eking out his

meagre livelihood to support his family back in India. The family of the deceased fisherman is traumatized by the loss of their sole bread winner and seeks the early return of his body. The sudden demise of the fisherman and the tragic circumstances surrounding his death have put his family to great financial and mental hardship.

I request you to direct the Indian Embassy at Bahrain and Qatar to take urgent steps to arrange for the transportation of the body of the deceased fisherman Thiru. Antony Arul Anish, back to Tamil Nadu at the earliest. I also request you to kindly direct the officials of the Indian Embassy to take up this matter with the employer and to ensure that the terminal monetary benefits due to Thiru. Antony Arul Anish are released to his family without any delay."

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## PM requested to secure release of 16 fishermen, 26 boats

### D.O. letter dated 01.09.2015

"The Sri Lankan Navy has yet again repeated its acts of harassment of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu. 16 fishermen in 3 fishing boats who set sail from Nagapattinam, Kottaipattinam and Mandapam fishing bases of Tamil Nadu on 29.08.2015 and 31.08.2015, were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy while peacefully pursuing their avocation in their traditional fishing waters in the early hours of 01.09.2015 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

The right to fish in the traditional waters of Palk Bay which has been historically enjoyed for several centuries by fishermen in Tamil Nadu is now being continuously infringed upon by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is widely accepted that fish and traditional fishermen know no boundaries. The IMBL itself is a matter sub judice in the Supreme Court of India. I have, in my personal capacity,

challenged the unconstitutional ceding of Katchatheevu island under the 1974 and 1976 Agreements and the Government of Tamil Nadu has also impleaded itself in the case. May I request you to proactively initiate an appropriate set of actions that will bring about a permanent solution to this sensitive issue that plagues the livelihood of thousands of Tamil Nadu fishermen who fish in their traditional fishing grounds in the Palk Bay, facing the daily threat of abduction at the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy?

Understanding the plight of our fishermen, my Government is implementing various innovative schemes to build up the capacity of our fishermen to venture deeper into Indian EEZ for fishing. I have recently launched a landmark scheme of providing Rs.30 lakh subsidy assistance for procuring new Deep Sea Fishing Boats, the first of its kind in the country aimed at equipping our fishermen to enhance their deep sea fishing capabilities. State Government funds of Rs.51.3 crore have been sanctioned as subsidy for building 171 Deep Sea Fishing Boats which will be directly benefiting 580 fishermen families. I have also sought assistance of Rs.1,520 crore as a comprehensive financial package from the Government of India for diversification of fishing into India's EEZ and to relieve the pressure on the Palk Bay. I request you to direct the Ministry of Agriculture to expeditiously consider and approve the detailed proposal submitted by the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Till a comprehensive solution to this vexatious issue is found, I request you to appropriately convey to the Sri Lankan authorities to instruct the Sri Lankan Navy to refrain from apprehending our fishermen and impounding their fishing boats. Sri Lanka's ongoing strategy of not releasing the apprehended boats and fishing gear even after releasing the fishermen has severely impaired the only means of livelihood of several fishermen families. This has caused great frustration amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. Hence I urge you again to take up this issue with the Sri Lankan authorities at the highest level and ensure the immediate release of the fishermen, their boats and fishing gear.

There is high expectation in Tamil Nadu that your Government at the Centre would act decisively on this very sensitive issue, which involves the livelihood of lakhs of poor fishermen households in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu.

I urge your personal intervention in this matter and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities urgently and secure the immediate release of the 16 fishermen and 26 fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody at the earliest."

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## Positive steps sought for release of 15 fishermen, 28 boats

### D.O. letter dated 22.09.2015

This is to bring to your notice yet another incident in which 15 fishermen in two fishing boats who set sail for fishing from Nagapattinam fishing base were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 21.09.2015 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

This latest apprehension of innocent and unarmed Tamil Nadu fishermen with a motive to intimidate and prevent them from venturing into their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay and in the vicinity of Katchatheevu, which has always been a part of the traditional fishing area of our fishermen, adds to the immense frustration that has built up among the fishermen community of Tamil Nadu.

Further, as you are aware, as on date, 26 fishing boats belonging to our fishermen still continue to be in Sri Lankan custody. Boats and fishing gear which are essential for the poor fishermen to earn their livelihood are deliberately

not released by the Sri Lankan authorities while releasing fishermen. Long periods of disuse condemns the boats and equipment to ruin and the poor fishermen are subjected to a huge permanent loss.

As I have reiterated on several occasions my Government strongly believes that the unconstitutional Indo-Sri Lankan Agreements of 1974 and 1976 should be nullified and the traditional rights of our fishermen restored at the earliest. I would like to once again point out that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. I had personally filed W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008, in which the Government of Tamil Nadu had also subsequently impleaded itself. The main prayer before the Supreme Court is to declare the 1974 and 1976 agreements along with the Executive Order of 1976 as null and void in the absence of the required mandatory Constitutional amendment, and to retrieve Katchatheevu for India. Our stand is that Katchatheevu has always been a part of India, geographically, culturally and historically and needs to be retrieved, keeping in view the livelihood interests and security of lakhs of Indian fishermen.

My Government is implementing various innovative schemes to build up the capacity of our fishermen to

venture into deep sea fishing in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). I have also sought for assistance of Rs.1,520 crore from the Government of India to enable diversification of fishing operations by the fishermen community.

The unjustified denial of the right of our fishermen to eke out their humble livelihood in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay should not be allowed to fester further. I am confident that your Government will find suitable mechanisms to resolve this long pending fishing dispute between India and Sri Lanka by retrieving Katchatheevu and restoring the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen. In the meantime, the immediate issue of the arrest of the fishermen needs to be addressed. I once again call upon the Government of India to take positive and concrete steps to secure the immediate release of the 15 fishermen and the 28 boats in Sri Lankan custody.

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# Anguish at more arrests, call for decisive measures

## D.O. letter dated 25.09.2015

"I write this letter with a deep sense of anguish that close on the heels of the arrest of 15 fishermen in two fishing boats from Nagapattinam fishing base on 21.09.2015, the Sri Lankan Navy has apprehended six fishermen and their two mechanized fishing boats who went for fishing from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukottai District. These fishermen have been taken to Kangesanthurai and remanded.

These innocent fishermen are the sole breadwinners of their families and engage in fishing in order to eke out a meager livelihood. Their arrest and detention will severely affect their families and dependants. As I have repeatedly pointed out, the right of livelihood of our fishermen to fish in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay to which they have a historical claim is infringed upon repeatedly and effectively by Sri Lanka. This is caused in no small measure due to the Government of India having entered into an ill-

advised agreement, which ceded the islet of Katchatheevu, historically part of India's territory and undisputedly an integral part of India. The constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. I had personally filed W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008, in which the Government of Tamil Nadu had also subsequently impleaded itself.

I am also constrained to point out that the Sri Lankan Government is practising a strategy of impounding the boats and other fishing equipment while releasing our fishermen. Needless to say, without their fishing boats and equipment, the poor fishermen are driven into a poverty stricken state. As on date 28 fishing boats are already in Sri Lankan custody.

I request the Government of India to initiate decisive measures to find a permanent solution to this sensitive livelihood issue of our fishermen. I request your immediate and personal intervention to secure the release of the 21 fishermen and the 30 fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody."

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## ‘Ensure that fishermen pursue livelihood with freedom and peace of mind’

### D.O. letter dated 30.09.2015

“This is to bring to your notice yet another incident wherein fishermen of Tamil Nadu have been apprehended and their right to fishing in their traditional waters has once again been infringed upon by the Sri Lankan Navy.

This is the third such apprehension within the span of a week. In this incident 7 fishermen in a motorised traditional fishing boat who set sail for gill net fishing from Therespuram fishing base of Thoothukudi District on 26.09.2015 were apprehended in the Gulf of Mannar area by the Sri Lankan Navy on 29.09.2015, and taken to Negombo, Sri Lanka.

In spite of the several steps being taken by my Government with an accommodative frame of mind to devise a permanent solution to this sensitive livelihood issue, the situation at sea remains precarious with the dubious actions of the Sri Lankan Government. I have

been requesting the Government of India to wage a strong diplomatic offensive to uphold the rights and interests of our Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu. The Sri Lankan Government continues its series of arrests of our fishermen while fishing in their traditional waters. The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the fishing boats, the sole source of livelihood of the poor fishermen, is further aggravating the situation. At present, 30 fishing boats continue in Sri Lankan custody and stand a risk of being damaged beyond repair with the impending advent of the monsoon.

I would like to reiterate that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India by me in W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008, in which the Government of Tamil Nadu had also subsequently impleaded itself.

I request you to intervene personally in this issue and use all diplomatic channels to ensure that our fishermen are allowed to pursue their livelihood with freedom and peace of mind in their traditional waters. I once again call for your immediate intervention to secure the release of these 7 fishermen and their traditional craft along with the 21 fishermen and their 30 fishing boats which are already in Sri Lankan custody."

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# Immediate action sought for release of fishermen, boats

## D.O. letter dated 02.10.2015

"I am constrained to write to you yet again to bring to your notice one more incident of apprehension of Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy. In this latest incident, 7 fishermen along with their boat who set out for fishing from Nagapattinam fishing base in Nagapattinam District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on the evening of 01.10.2015 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

This latest belligerent act of the Sri Lankan Navy perpetrated on innocent and unarmed Indian fishermen adds to the immense frustration that has built up among the fishermen community of Tamil Nadu. These repeated apprehensions of our innocent fishermen are done with a motive to intimidate and prevent our fishermen from venturing into their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay which has always been a part of the traditional fishing area of our fishermen.

My Government strongly believes that the unconstitutional Indo-Sri Lankan Agreements of 1974 and 1976 should be nullified and the traditional rights of our fishermen restored at the earliest. I would like to once again reiterate that Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. I had personally filed W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008, in which the Government of Tamil Nadu had also subsequently impleaded itself. The main prayer before the Supreme Court is to declare the 1974 and 1976 agreements as null and void in the absence of the required mandatory Constitutional amendment, and to retrieve Katchatheevu for India.

I request you to take immediate action through diplomatic channels to secure the release of our 7 Indian fishermen and their fishing boat apprehended on 01.10.2015 as well as the release of the 28 fishermen and 31 fishing boats which are still in Sri Lankan custody and arrange for their immediate repatriation.

May I request your immediate personal intervention in this matter?"

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# Speedy action sought on release of fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 11.10.2015

"I am constrained to write to you yet again to bring to your direct attention the fifth consecutive unprovoked instance of arrest and detention of innocent and poor fishermen from Tamil Nadu while fishing in their traditional fishing waters off the coast of Southern Tamil Nadu. It is with anguish that I have to point out that these five instances have taken place within the span of a few weeks.

In the latest incident, 19 fishermen along with their 2 boats from Tamil Nadu who had set out for fishing from Nagapattinam fishing base in Nagapattinam District, were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 10.10.2015 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka. With this incident, the number of fishermen currently in Sri Lankan custody is 54. In addition totally 34 boats are also in the custody of Sri Lankan authorities. Despite my

repeated requests to you to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities and ensure the early release of the fishermen and their boats, there has been little response and the fishermen have suffered prolonged detention.

I have repeatedly and emphatically brought to your notice Tamil Nadu’s consistent stance about the unconstitutionality of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 and the ceding of the Katchatheevu islet, which is the root cause of the problem. Our fishermen are being denied the right to peaceful fishing in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay to which they have a historical claim. The denial of this right and the prolonged incarceration of our fishermen in Sri Lankan jails after being unlawfully apprehended while rightfully engaging in their livelihood activity of fishing in their traditional waters is causing considerable misery and frustration amongst the fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu. I have already brought to your notice the damage that fishing boats and fishing gear suffer due to prolonged disuse while they are impounded by the Sri Lankan authorities and the resultant adverse impact on livelihood of fishing families in Tamil Nadu.

We are still awaiting the much anticipated strong and sustained diplomatic initiative to resolve the vexatious issue of ensuring safety, security and livelihood of our fishermen in the Palk Bay and to find a lasting solution

that restores and safeguards the traditional fishing rights of Indian fishermen in their traditional fishing waters.

I also seek early sanction of the Comprehensive Special Package for Diversification of fisheries at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging which I had requested as part of the Memorandum presented to you on 03.06.2014.

The release of the 54 fishermen and 34 fishing boats from Tamil Nadu currently in Sri Lankan custody must be accorded the highest priority. It is time that the issue is taken up not only through the normal diplomatic channels but at an appropriately high political level and the release of the fishermen and the boats secured without further delay.

May I request an urgent response in the matter?"

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# Chief Minister's missive to Prime Minister 'Take up fishermen's issue with Sri Lanka at highest political level'

## D.O. letter dated 13.10.2015

"I wish to draw your immediate and personal attention to the sixth instance of arrest and remand of innocent Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy, within a span of a few weeks. In the last 20 days there have been 6 separate incidents in which fishermen from Tamil Nadu have been arrested and continue to be in detention and their boats have been seized by the Sri Lankan Navy. **In the latest incident which occurred on the night of 12.10.2015, 24 fishermen who set sail in 4 boats from Rameswaram fishing base in Ramanathapuram District were arrested and taken to Thalaimannar in Sri Lanka. As on date, 78 fishermen from Tamil Nadu and 38 boats of fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu are in Sri Lankan custody.**

I had hoped that after the change of regime in Sri Lanka there would be a positive change in the hostile environment

created for fishermen from the coastal Districts of Tamil Nadu while fishing in their traditional fishing waters, and the aggressive actions of the Sri Lankan Navy would cease. Unfortunately, such incidents of apprehension of Tamil Nadu fishermen show no signs of abating and continue with painful regularity. Such incidents inflict huge misery and hardship on the fishermen community.

Despite my taking up the issue repeatedly with you there has been no concrete action and our fishermen are suffering prolonged incarceration in Sri Lankan jails. You will agree that this is an unacceptable situation which has to be remedied through a set of comprehensive measures including securing the urgent release of the fishermen in custody.

My stance on the issue of Katchatheevu is well known and has to form the basis of any long term solution to this issue. The unconstitutional Indo-Sri Lankan Agreements of 1974 and 1976 should be nullified and the traditional rights of our fishermen restored at the earliest. I would like to once again reiterate that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. I had personally filed W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008, in which the Government of Tamil Nadu has also subsequently impleaded itself. The

main prayer before the Supreme Court is to declare the 1974 and 1976 agreements as null and void in the absence of the required mandatory Constitutional amendment, and to retrieve Katchatheevu for India.

The other major component of the long term solution is the Comprehensive Special Package for deep sea fishing and infrastructure at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore with a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging which I had requested as part of the Memorandum presented to you on 03.06.2014. I underscore the need to expedite approval of this package without further delay.

**The issue of harassment and frequent arrests of Tamil Nadu fishermen is an abrogation of their traditional fishing rights in their traditional fishing areas. This is a livelihood issue of thousands of our fisher folk and is taking on a huge social and political dimension. India cannot continue to be seen as a mute spectator as the rights of Indian fishermen are repeatedly infringed upon. The issue thus requires urgent intervention not merely at a diplomatic level but also at the highest political level. In the present circumstances I have no doubt that you would agree that the fishermen issue needs to be placed at the top of the agenda in any interaction with Sri Lanka.**

I do hope that through concerted action you would be able to secure the immediate release of our 78 fishermen and 38 fishing boats from Tamil Nadu currently in Sri

Lankan custody including the 24 fishermen and 4 boats apprehended on 12.10.2015. We expect that concrete action on the long term solution to this issue will also be initiated forthwith."

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## ‘Strong message against arrests necessary’

### D.O. letter dated 14.10.2015

“Close on the heels of the arrest of 24 fishermen from Tamil Nadu and their 4 boats on 12.10.2015, which I have brought to your immediate personal attention in my letter dated 13.10.2015, it is shocking to know that 9 more fishermen who set sail from Nagapattinam fishing base in Nagapattinam District have been apprehended in the early hours of 14.10.2015, along with their boat by the Sri Lankan Navy. This is the seventh instance of arrest and remand of innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy within a span of three weeks. With this latest incident of apprehension, the total number of fishermen from Tamil Nadu currently in Sri Lankan custody has risen to 87 and there are also 39 boats in Sri Lankan custody.

You will appreciate that these fishermen belong to the poorest sections of society and incarceration in

an alien land means severe mental agony and loss of livelihood not only for the detainees but also for their beleaguered families. The entire fishermen community in Tamil Nadu is greatly exercised over the repeated instances of apprehension of our innocent fishermen while fishing in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay. These continuous attacks should be countered effectively by coercive diplomacy. Our diplomats in Colombo should take up the matter with the Government of Sri Lanka and take concrete steps to secure the immediate release of all the 87 fishermen and their 39 boats in Sri Lankan custody. The intervention should not only be at the diplomatic level but also at the highest political level. A strong message should be delivered to the Sri Lankan authorities that such unprovoked apprehensions should stop forthwith.

In the meantime, I request you to take immediate action to secure the release of our 87 fishermen and 39 boats currently in Sri Lankan custody.

I request urgent concrete action on this issue."

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## Chief Minister writes to Prime Minister as Sri Lanka arrests more fishermen

### D.O. letter dated 27.10.2015

"I write to bring to your notice that even before the 86 fishermen currently in Sri Lankan custody could actually be released as informed on 24.10.2015 by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, it is shocking to learn that 34 fishermen from Tamil Nadu along with their 7 boats have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in two separate incidents that occurred on 26.10.2015 and 27.10.2015.

As you are aware, in response to my relentless efforts, the Government of India intervened with the Sri Lankan authorities to secure the release of 86 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu who had been arrested over the past two months while peacefully pursuing their livelihood activities in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay. Even before these fishermen could return home, 10 fishermen in 2 boats who set sail from the Rameswaram fishing base on

26.10.2015 have been taken into custody and detained in Talaimanar in Sri Lanka. In yet another at Kankesanthurai in the early hours of 27.10.2015.The arrest and detention of these fishermen who were peacefully engaged in fishing activities in their traditional fishing waters unjustified.

I have already pointed out on a number of occasions that the Sri Lankan authorities apart from apprehending and detaining the poor fishermen from Tamil Nadu, keep the fishing boats in custody which causes huge loss both in terms of deterioration of the vessels and the fishing equipment and also loss of livelihood opportunities. This is not only inhuman but also aimed at destroying the livelihood base of the poor marine fishermen in Tamil Nadu.

I have repeatedly urged that a permanent solution to this vexatious issue must be found without further delay. I have also outlined the contours of such a solution in the Memorandum that I have presented to you on 03.06.2014 ,and emphasize the same in my letters addressed to you on this issue and the Memorandum presented to you on 07.08.2015. I have repeatedly and emphatically pointed out that the unconstitutionality of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 and the ceding of the Katchatheevu islet, is the root cause of the problem. I had also sought the early sanction of the Comprehensive special package for deep sea fishing and infrastructure at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore. As you are aware, the Members of

Parliament from Tamil Nadu also met the Union Minister for External Affairs on 26.10.2015 and presented the letters written by me conveying the concerns on my Government on this issue and urged the Government of India to take immediate action as requested in the Letters. I request you to immediately act on our long pending demands for a sustainable solution to this vexatious issue.

I request you to immediately direct the concerned officials in the Ministry of External Affairs to contact their counterparts on the Sri Lankan side and ensure that the 34 fishermen arrested on 26.10.2015, are released forthwith along with the 86 fishermen who are due to be releases on 28.10.2015. Further,I request you to immediately take up the issue of release of the 46 boats in Sri Lankan custody including the 7 boats which were apprehended on 26.10.2015 and 27.10.2015.

May, I request you to kindly take immediate action in this regard?"

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# Chief Minister raises livelihood issue of Tamil fisherfolk with PM

## D.O. letter dated 01.11.2015

"As you are aware, I had written to you on 22.09.2015, 25.09.2015, 30.09.2015, 02.10.2015, 11.10.2015, 13.10.2015 and 14.10.2015 regarding the pathetic plight of 86 fishermen from Tamil Nadu who have been incarcerated in Sri Lankan jails, and their boats impounded by the Sri Lankan authorities. I had requested you to take steps for the immediate release of the fishermen, along with their boats, and had emphasized the need for the Government of India to find a permanent solution to this long pending and vexatious issue. The Members of Parliament from Tamil Nadu had also met the Union Minister for External Affairs on 26.10.2015 and presented the letters written by me conveying the concerns of my Government on this issue.

In response to my request, the Ministry of External Affairs informed the Government of Tamil Nadu on

24.10.2015 that the Government of Sri Lanka had expressed its readiness for the simultaneous release of fishermen in custody on both sides. Accordingly, I had instructed that the two Sri Lankan fishermen in custody in Tamil Nadu be released. However, before the 86 fishermen could actually be released, 34 fishermen from Tamil Nadu, along with 7 boats, were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in two separate incidents. The officers of my Government have been in constant touch with the officials of the Ministry of External Affairs and they have been informed that all the fishermen from Tamil Nadu would soon reach home after fulfilling the required formalities.

Even as the fishermen of Tamil Nadu are eagerly awaiting the arrival of their brethren, in yet another incident, 6 more fishermen, along with their mechanized fishing boat from Tamil Nadu who set out for fishing from the Rameswaram fishing base in Ramanathapuram District, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 31.10.2015 and they have been taken to Talaimannar, Sri Lanka.

I have repeatedly and emphatically brought to your notice Tamil Nadu's consistent stance about the unconstitutionality of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreements of 1974 and 1976 and the ceding of the Katchatheevu islet, which is the root cause of the problem. Our fishermen are being denied the right to peaceful fishing in the traditional

waters of the Palk Bay to which they have a historical claim.

I have already brought to your notice the damage that fishing boats and fishing gear suffer due to prolonged disuse while they are impounded by the Sri Lankan authorities which has a severe adverse impact on the livelihood of fishermen of Tamil Nadu. I also seek early sanction of the comprehensive special package for deep sea fishing and infrastructure at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore and the recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging, which I had requested as part of the Memorandum presented to you on 03.06.2014 and 07.08.2015.

This livelihood issue of thousands of our fisherfolk needs your personal intervention. I hope that you would take concerted steps to ensure the release of all the Tamil Nadu fishermen and their boats now in Sri Lankan custody in the next few days. I also request you to intervene at the highest political level to bring about a lasting solution to this long pending vexatious problem involving the lives and livelihood of hundreds of thousands of Tamil Nadu fishermen."

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# Chief Minister writes to PM seeking expeditious release of fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 20.11.2015

"You would recall that I have written to you on several occasions bringing to your notice the repeated instances of abduction and apprehension of innocent fishermen belonging to the coastal Districts of Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy while pursuing their peaceful avocation of fishing in their traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay. It is unfortunate that, in yet another incident, 14 fishermen with their 3 mechanised fishing boats who set out for fishing from the Rameswaram and Mandapam fishing bases in Ramanathapuram District, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 18.11.2015, and they have been taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka. I am also informed that on 08.11.2015, 4 fishermen in a motorised country boat who had drifted and got stranded on the Sri Lankan shores due to engine failure are yet to be sent back to India.

I am also constrained to point out that already, 47 fishing boats along with fishing gear which are essential for fishermen to earn their livelihood, are still in the custody of Sri Lankan authorities and have not yet been released. The impounded boats that are perilously berthed, face the imminent threat of irreparable damage due to long periods of disuse and the onset of the monsoon. It will condemn the boats and equipment to ruin and the poor fishermen who are currently suffering a temporary loss of livelihood, would be subjected to a huge permanent loss.

My Government firmly believes that the unconstitutional Indo-Sri Lankan Agreements of 1974 and 1976 and the unilateral ceding of the Katchatheevu islet is the root cause of the problem. The historic rights of the fishermen from Tamil Nadu to their peaceful avocation of fishing in the traditional waters of the Palk Bay are being consistently infringed upon by the Sri Lankan Navy and our fishermen are put to untold hardship.

The Comprehensive Special Package for deep sea fishing and infrastructure at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore and the recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging, which I had requested as part of the Memoranda presented to you on 03.06.2014 and 07.08.2015 are still awaiting the approval of the Government of India.

This livelihood issue of thousands of our fisherfolk needs your personal intervention. The Government of

India should not allow this issue to fester further. I request you to take immediate action through diplomatic channels to secure the release of the 14 Indian fishermen and 50 fishing boats from Sri Lankan custody as well as the early return of the 4 fishermen who had drifted to the Sri Lankan shores due to engine failure on 08.11.2015.

I kindly request your immediate intervention in the matter."

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## ‘Take up issue of seized boats at the highest levels with Sri Lanka’

**D.O. letter dated 26.11.2015**

“This is to bring to your notice, yet another incident of apprehension of fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy in their traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay. The attacks on and apprehension of our fishermen continue unabated, creating a sense of fear and unrest among the fisherfolk in Tamil Nadu.

It has been reported that 11 fishermen in 2 mechanised fishing boats, who set out for fishing from Rameswaram fishing base in Ramanathapuram District, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 25.11.2015, and taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka. In yet another incident, 4 fishermen in a mechanised fishing boat who set out for fishing from Kottaipattinam fishing base in Pudukottai District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 26.11.2015 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

These poor fishermen were peacefully following their avocation of fishing which is the only means of livelihood known to them. They were fishing in the Palk Bay which historically is their traditional fishing waters. The issue of the International Maritime Boundary Line is sub judice in the Supreme Court of India, wherein the validity of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 ceding the islet of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka has been challenged by me on very valid grounds to which the Government of Tamil Nadu has also impleaded itself as a party.

As I have mentioned to you many times in the past, 50 boats continue to be in Sri Lankan custody for many months now. Our fishermen are extremely concerned that their fishing boats, their sole livelihood source, would become unsalvageable after the onslaught of the North-East monsoon which has been particularly heavy this year. It is highly disheartening that the only means of livelihood of several fishermen has been left without care and exposed to adverse weather conditions along the coast of Sri Lanka. Hence it is imperative that the issue of the release of these boats is taken up with the highest levels of the Sri Lankan administration and the immediate release of these boats is ensured.

I request you to immediately direct the concerned officials in the ministry of External Affairs to take immediate action through diplomatic channels to secure

the release of 29 fishermen and 53 fishing boats including the 15 fishermen and their 3 fishing boats apprehended on 26.11.2015. In addition the 4 fishermen in a motorized fishing boat who drifted on 08.11.2015, to the Sri Lankan shores due to mechanical failure continue to be stranded in Sri Lanka. Their early return also needs to be secured."

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## PM's personal intervention urged for release of fishermen, boats

### D.O. letter dated 20.12.2015

"I write to bring to your notice that close on the heels of the incident of apprehension of fishermen from Tamil Nadu on 17.12.2015, there has been yet another incident on 19.12.2015, in which the Sri Lankan Navy apprehended one Mechanized Fishing Boat with 6 fishermen on board, who went for fishing from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukottai District. The boat and the fishermen have been taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

The frequency of apprehensions and abductions of our fishermen is on the increase. These recurrent instances of attacks upon, and abductions of, our fishermen on the high seas in the Palk Bay should be stopped immediately and our fishermen should be allowed to pursue their peaceful avocation of fishing in their traditional fishing waters of Palk Bay.

It is the consistent stand of the Government of Tamil Nadu that the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka cannot be treated as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements ceding Katchatheevu islet have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by me, in my personal capacity, in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008 and subsequently, the Government of Tamil Nadu has also impleaded itself in this case.

The Comprehensive Special Package for deep sea fishing and infrastructure at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore and the recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging, which I had requested as part of the Memoranda presented to you on 03.06.2014 and 07.08.2015, are still awaiting the approval of the Government of India.

As on date, 56 fishing boats with their fishing gear are still languishing in Sri Lankan custody for several months. Long period of disuse and the exposure to the onslaught of an exceptionally strong North-East monsoon this year would have inflicted severe damages to the boats and equipment. The poor fishermen who are currently suffering a temporary loss of livelihood, would now be subjected to a huge permanent livelihood loss due to the damage to the fishing boats. I request that the Government of India take

necessary action to restore in a refurbished condition the boats and fishing gear of these poor fishermen.

I urge your personal intervention in this matter and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to strongly take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities to secure the immediate release of 47 fishermen and 57 fishing boats including the 6 fishermen and their fishing boat apprehended on 19.12.2015. I also request you to expedite the return of four Indian fishermen and their motorised craft that was stranded on Sri Lankan shores on 08.11.2015 due to mechanical failure.

May I request you to take immediate action in this regard?"

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## ‘Act decisively for immediate release of fishermen, boats’

**D.O. letter dated 31.12.2015**

“I write to bring to your notice yet another unfortunate incident of apprehension of our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy on the eve of the New year. I understand that 3 mechanized fishing boats with 29 fishermen on board, went for fishing on 27.12.2015 from Akkaraipettai fishing base of Nagapattinam District and were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 31.12.2015. The boats and the fishermen have been taken to Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

The recurrent instances of attacks upon, and abductions of, our fishermen on the high seas in the Palk Bay continue unabated and are a matter of serious concern affecting the life and livelihood of Tamil Nadu fishermen on a daily basis. The Government of Tamil Nadu reiterates its commitment to the retrieval of Katchatheevu, which it considers to be an integral part of India. I also reiterate my request to the Government of India not to treat the

International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question, as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements has been challenged on very valid legal grounds by me, in my personal capacity, in the Supreme Court of India in W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008 and subsequently, the Government of Tamil Nadu has also impleaded itself in this case.

I had requested as part of my Memoranda presented to you on 03.06.2014 and 07.08.2015, the sanction of a comprehensive Special Package for deep sea fishing and infrastructure at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging. I request the Government of India to expedite the approval of the package.

I would like to remind you that prior to the most recent occurrence, 55 fishermen and 59 fishing boats are still in Sri Lankan custody. The fishing boats have been subjected to serious damages due to prolonged periods of disuse and the onslaught of the exceptionally strong monsoon this year. I request that the only means of livelihood of these fisherfolk is restored in a refurbished condition by the Government of India at the earliest. Further, it is very unfortunate that these innocent fishermen have continued to be incarcerated throughout the festive season which they were unable to spend with their families.

I urge your personal intervention in this matter and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities in a concrete and decisive manner so as to secure the immediate release of 84 Tamil fishermen and 62 fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody including the 29 fishermen and their 3 fishing boats apprehended on 31.12.2015.

May I request you to take immediate action in this matter?”

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## Spate of arrests of fishermen sparks fresh concern
## Chief Minister writes to PM seeking permanent solution

### D.O. letter dated 05.01.2016

"It is unfortunate that the apprehension and arrest of Indian fishermen while pursuing their avocation of fishing in their traditional waters by the Sri Lankan Navy continues unabated. I write to bring to your notice four incidents that have occurred in rapid succession in the last 24 hours in which 20 fishermen in four mechanized fishing boats have been arrested and detained. This includes one boat with 8 fishermen from Akkaraipettai, Nagapattinam District, who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 04.01.2016 and taken to Mullaitheevu. On 05.01.2016, two boats with 8 fishermen from Ramanathapuram district were arrested and taken to Thalaimannar; and 4 fishermen in one boat from Pudukkottai district were arrested and taken to Kankesanthurai. With this, the total number of fishermen from Tamil Nadu in Sri Lankan custody has reached 104. It is very regrettable that many of these fishermen have continued to be kept in custody for several

weeks now and were unable to spend the festive season with their families.

In addition, there are now 66 fishing vessels with gear in Sri Lankan custody. This includes boats of fishermen who were released many months ago, which have not been returned. These boats have been lying on the sea shore, totally exposed to the elements. The boats and the fishing gear would have become completely unusable by now. This has been a big blow to the livelihood of these fisherfolk families.

The continued incarceration of the fishermen and their boats for extended periods and the apparent lack of any serious effort on behalf of the Government of India to obtain their early release has contributed in no small measure to the sense of despondency amongst the coastal fishermen community.

My Government stays committed to restoring and upholding the historic rights of fishermen from Tamil Nadu to fish in their traditional fishing waters of Palk Bay. The repeated attempts by the Sri Lankan Navy to infringe on these traditional rights of our fishermen by persistent resort to coercive tactics, including arrest and detention in custody, needs to be brought to an end through concerted efforts by the Government of India. People in Tamil Nadu are also increasingly unhappy with the lack of any

concrete measures on behalf of the Government of India on the vexed fishermen issue.

You are well aware that the issue of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) itself is sub judice in the Supreme Court of India, as I have challenged the constitutional validity of the Indo- Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 in my personal capacity. The Government of Tamil Nadu has also subsequently impleaded itself in this case.

For the first time in the country, my Government launched a prestigious scheme of providing subsidy up to Rs.30 lakhs per vessel to procure new Deep Sea Fishing Vessels, aimed at equipping our fishermen to expand their deep sea fishing capabilities. I have already sought assistance of Rs.1,520 crore as a comprehensive financial package from the Government of India, for promoting deep sea fishing and developing infrastructure with a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging for deep sea fishing and infrastructure. There has been no forward movement even on this proposal of the Government of Tamil Nadu in the last 18 months. I reiterate my request for early sanction of the proposal.

Since the prolonged detention and disuse of the boats and gear in custody coupled with exposure to the severe monsoon has caused considerable damage to the boats and ruined the equipment, I strongly urge the Government

of India to not only secure the early release of the boats and equipment, but also to restore the only means of livelihood of our fishermen in a refurbished condition by the Government of India at the earliest.

It is imperative to proactively initiate an appropriate set of actions that will bring about a permanent solution to this sensitive issue that plagues the livelihood of thousands of Tamil Nadu fishermen. In the meantime, I urge your personal intervention in this matter and request you to ensure that the matter is effectively taken up at the highest level with the Sri Lankan Government to secure the immediate release of the 104 fishermen and 66 fishing boats currently in Sri Lankan custody.

May I request you to take immediate action in this regard?”

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# Governor lauds Chief Minister's dynamic leadership "Tamil Nadu, a model welfare State in implementing inclusive growth scheme"

## D.O. letter dated 19.01.2016

"I write again to bring to your notice two more incidents of apprehension of 6 Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy on 17.01.2016 and 19.01.2016. These incidents are a rude shock, coming as they do, when Tamil Nadu is eagerly awaiting the home coming of the 104 fishermen whose release has been announced after several months of incarceration in Sri Lankan Jails.

In the latest incident, 3 fishermen in a mechanised fishing boat from Tamil Nadu had set out for fishing from Kottaipattinam fishing base in Pudukottai District, and were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 17.01.2016 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka. 3 other fishermen in a motorized country craft from Tamil Nadu, who had set out for fishing on 17.01.2016 from Sethubavachatram fishing base in Thanjavur District, have been apprehended on 19.01.2016.

The right to fish in the traditional waters of Palk Bay which has been historically enjoyed by our fishermen in Tamil Nadu is now being continuously denied by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is my Government's stand that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by me in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008. The Government of Tamil Nadu has also been subsequently impleaded in these cases.

While we are happy to learn of the release of the 104 fishermen, it must not be forgotten that 66 fishing boats and gear, which are the basic requirement for fishermen to earn their livelihood, have not been released yet. These boats and gear continue to suffer damage and deterioration due to long periods of disuse and exposure to the elements particularly due to the heavy North East Monsoon this year.

I request that these boats and gear, the only means of livelihood of the fishermen, are restored and returned to our fishermen in a refurbished condition by the Government of India at the earliest.

My Government has encouraged deep sea fishing so as to ensure better livelihood opportunities to the fishermen

by providing subsidy assistance for purchasing deep sea tuna long liners. There is an urgent need for sanction of the comprehensive special package of deep sea fishing and infrastructure at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore with a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging which I had requested as part of the Memoranda presented to you on 03.06.2014 and 07.08.2015.

I request you to immediately direct the concerned officials in the Ministry of External Affairs to take expeditious action through diplomatic channels to secure the release of the 6 fishermen along with 68 fishing boats".

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## Urgent action sought for immediate release of 15 fishermen, 69 fishing boats

**D.O. letter dated 01.02.2016**

"I am constrained to write to you yet again to bring to your notice the repeated instances of apprehension of innocent Indian fishermen belonging to the coastal Districts of Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is reported that 5 Indian fishermen in a boat from Jegathapattinam and 4 more fishermen in a boat from Kottaipattinam, both in Pudukottai District, have been apprehended along with their boats by the Sri Lankan Navy on the evening of 30.01.2016 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

Based on my repeated requests and the Government of India's efforts all the Indian fishermen who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy during 2015 have been released, but their boats and fishing gear, which are essential to earn their livelihood, have not yet been released, aggravating the sense of frustration and despondency amongst the fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu. I reiterate my

request that the fishing boats and gear be restored to our fishermen in a refurbished condition by the Government of India at the earliest.

My Government strongly believes that the unconstitutional Indo-Sri Lankan Agreements of 1974 and 1976 should be nullified and the traditional rights of our fishermen restored at the earliest. As you are aware, these agreements are under legal challenge on grounds of constitutional validity in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

My Government has taken many steps for deep sea fishing activities amongst the Palk Bay fishing communities, including provision of subsidy assistance for purchasing deep sea tuna long liners and promoting use of gill nets. I have also sought assistance to the extent of Rs.1,520 crore as a comprehensive financial package with a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging, from the Government of India, for deep sea fishing and infrastructure in the Memoranda I presented to you on 03.06.2014 and 07.08.2015. I reiterate my request for early sanction of the Government of Tamil Nadu's proposal.

I urge your personal intervention to prevent the aggravation that the Sri Lankan authorities and Navy are causing to our fishermen. I specifically request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the

matter with the Sri Lankan authorities urgently and secure the immediate release of the 15 fishermen and 69 fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody including the 9 fishermen and their 2 fishing boats apprehended on 30.01.2016".

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# Chief Minister seeks permanent solution in face of more arrests

## D.O. letter dated 01.02.2016

"It is unfortunate that the apprehension and arrest of our Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy while pursuing their traditional avocation of fishing, continues unabated. I write to bring to your notice that two mechanized fishing boats with 12 fishermen onboard, who went for fishing on 10.02.2016, from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 11.02.2016, and taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka.

My Government stays committed to ensuring and upholding the traditional rights of fishermen from Tamil Nadu to fish in their traditional fishing waters of Palk Bay. The repeated attempts by the Sri Lankan Navy to prevent the exercise of their traditional rights by our fishermen by continuing apprehensions, arrests and assaults cannot be allowed to continue further and needs to be halted through concerted efforts by the Government of India.

I have also repeatedly pointed out that the Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the apprehended boats and fishing gear even after releasing the fishermen has severely impaired the means of livelihood of several fishermen families causing great frustration and despondency amongst the fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu. The prolonged detention, long periods of disuse and the monsoon would have severely damaged these boats. I request that the boats and fishing gear, which are the only means of livelihood of our fishermen, are restored and refurbished by the Government of India at the earliest.

You are well aware that the position of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) itself is a matter which is sub judice in the Supreme Court of India as I have challenged the constitutional validity of the Indo- Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 in my personal capacity, and subsequently, the Government of Tamil Nadu has also impleaded itself in this case.

A prestigious scheme of providing subsidy up to Rs.30 lakhs for procuring new Deep Sea Fishing Boats, aimed at equipping our fishermen to expand their deep sea fishing capabilities for the first time in the country, launched by my Government, is under progress. I have also sought assistance to the extent of Rs.1,520 crore as a comprehensive financial package with a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging, from the Government of India for deep sea fishing and

infrastructure. I reiterate my request for early sanction of the Government of Tamil Nadu's proposal.

There is an urgent and imperative need to proactively initiate an appropriate set of actions that will bring about a permanent solution to the fishermen issue that plagues the livelihoods of thousands of Tamil Nadu fishermen. Meanwhile, I urge your personal intervention in this matter and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities so as to secure the immediate release of 27 fishermen and 71 fishing boats including the 12 fishermen and their two fishing boats apprehended on 11.02.2016.

May I request you to take immediate action in this regard?"

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## Sri Lanka strategy of not releasing boats hits fishermen badly

**D.O. letter dated 03.03.2016**

"It is unfortunate that the apprehension of our Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy, while pursuing their traditional avocation of fishing, continues unabated. These continued instances of apprehension and abduction of our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy are causing considerable unrest and resentment among the Tamil Nadu fishermen.

I write to bring to your notice that 4 fishermen on board one motorised traditional craft, who went for fishing on 01.03.2016, from Arcottuthurai and another 4 fishermen on board another motorised traditional craft, who went for fishing on 02.03.2016, from Kodiakarai fishing base, both in Nagapattinam District, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 03.03.2016, and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

It is important to note that our fishermen are only following their traditional occupation and fishing in an

area to which they have a historic claim - their traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay. The very ownership of these waters and the position of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) are matters which are sub-judice in the Supreme Court of India as I had challenged the constitutional validity of the Indo- Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 in my personal capacity, and subsequently, the Government of Tamil Nadu has also impleaded itself in this case.

My Government has also initiated many steps for deep sea fishing activities amongst the Palk Bay fishing communities, including provision of subsidy assistance for purchasing deep sea tuna long liners. I have also sought assistance to the extent of Rs.1,520 crore as a comprehensive financial package with a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging from the Government of India for deep sea fishing and infrastructure in the Memoranda I presented to you on 03.06.2014 and 07.08.2015. I reiterate my request for early sanction of the Government of Tamil Nadu's proposal.

As I had repeatedly pointed out, the Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the apprehended boats and fishing gear even after releasing the fishermen has severely impaired the means of livelihood of several fishermen families causing great frustration and despondency amongst the fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu. The prolonged detention and

disuse of these boats even through the severe North East monsoon would have caused extensive and irretreivable damage.  I reiterate my request that the fishing boats and gear of the poor fishermen are restored in a refurbished condition by the Government of India at the earliest.

There is an urgent and imperative need to proactively initiate appropriate actions to deliver a permanent solution to this sensitive issue that plagues the livelihoods of thousands of Tamil Nadu fishermen. I urge your personal intervention in this matter and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities in a concrete and decisive manner so as to secure the immediate release of 35 fishermen and 73 fishing boats including the 8 fishermen and their two fishing boats apprehended on 03.03.2016.

May I request you to take immediate action in this regard?"

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## Right to livelihood of our fishermen ‘repeatedly infringed by Sri Lanka’

**D.O. letter dated 07.03.2016**

“I am constrained to bring to your notice that the apprehension of fishermen of Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan navy continues unabated. On 06.03.2016, 29 fishermen from Tamil Nadu and their 4 fishing crafts have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in two separate incidents.

In the first incident, 9 fishermen on board one mechanised fishing boat, who ventured into the sea for fishing from the Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District, were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 06.03.2016, and taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka. In another incident, 15 fishermen on board two motorised traditional boats and 5 fishermen on board one motorised traditional boat who went for fishing from Threspuram fishing base of Thoothukudi District were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 06.03.2016, and taken to Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka.

The right to life and livelihood of the fishermen of the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu who carry on fishing in the traditional waters of the Palk Bay is being continuously infringed upon by the Sri Lankan Navy's recurrent actions of apprehension, attack and harassment of the innocent fishermen. It is the consistent stand of the Government of Tamil Nadu that a permanent solution to this vexatious problem faced by our fishermen will be possible only by restoring India's sovereignty over Katchatheevu thereby securing their right to fish in their traditional waters. The position of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) itself is a matter which is sub judice in the Supreme Court of India as the constitutional validity of the Indo- Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 has been challenged.

The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the apprehended boats and fishing gear even after releasing the fishermen has severely impaired the means of livelihood of several fishermen families causing great frustration and despondency amongst the fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu. The prolonged detention and disuse of these boats and severe monsoon have caused irrevocable damage to them in Sri Lanka. The fishing boats and gear should be restored in a refurbished condition by the Government of India at the earliest.

There is an urgent and imperative need to ensure that our fishermen are not arrested and abducted on the high

seas. Proactive action needs to be initiated at the highest level to ensure a permanent solution to this sensitive issue that plagues the livelihoods of thousands of Tamil Nadu fishermen. As an immediate measure, I request your personal intervention to issue specific directions to the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities and to secure the immediate release of our 64 fishermen and 77 fishing boats still in Sri Lankan custody. This includes the 29 fishermen and their four fishing boats apprehended on 06.03.2016.

May I request you to accord the highest priority to this issue?"

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## Amma expresses deep anguish to PM at fresh arrests of fishermen

### D.O. letter dated 14.03.2016

"I write to you with a deep sense of anguish that in the latest set of incidents, 28 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, along with their 4 fishing boats, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. Inadequate response of the Union Government on such incidents of apprehension and detention of our fishermen has emboldened the Sri Lankan Navy to harass the Tamil Nadu Fishermen while exercising their livelihood rights to fish in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay.

In the first incident 5 fishermen on board one mechanised fishing boat, who ventured into the sea for fishing from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 13.03.2016, and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka. In another incident, 23 fishermen on board three motorised traditional boats who went for fishing from

Pamban fishing base of Ramanathapuram District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 12.03.2016, and taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka.

I have been writing repeatedly seeking strong diplomatic action to ensure that such incidents do not occur and to secure the immediate release of our fishermen and their boats in Sri Lankan custody. Including the 4 fishing boats apprehended on 13.03.2016, 82 of our fishing boats continue to be in Sri Lankan custody suffering from neglect and damage. The prolonged detention and disuse of these boats and the onslaught of the severe monsoon have caused irreparable damage to them. I reiterate that the fishing boats and gear should be restored in a refurbished condition to the fishermen at the earliest.

The continuing apprehension and detention of our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy is causing a deep sense of frustration and anger amongst the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu. Their right to livelihood of fishing in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay, which they have enjoyed from times immemorial, is being infringed upon repeatedly by Sri Lanka. It is the consistent stand of the Government of Tamil Nadu that a permanent solution to this vexatious problem faced by our fishermen will be possible only by restoring India's sovereignty over Katchatheevu thereby securing their rights to fish in their traditional waters. The position of the International Maritime Boundary

Line (IMBL) itself is a matter which is sub judice in the Supreme Court of India as the constitutional validity of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 has been challenged.

I hope that there will now be a decisive shift in the stance of the Government of India towards handling this question under your leadership. The Government of India should now find a lasting and permanent solution to this long pending and highly emotive issue which also carries grave security implications for our State.

I request you to put in place a strong and robust diplomatic response registering India's disapproval in the strongest possible terms of the belligerent actions of the Sri Lankan Navy. I request you to direct the concerned officials in the ministry of External Affairs to take concrete action through diplomatic channels to secure the immediate release of our 96 fishermen and 82 fishing boats including the 28 fishermen and their 4 fishing boats apprehended on 13.03.2016.

May I look forward to early action? ”

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## Amma immediately takes up cause of arrested fishermen

### D.O. letter dated 28.04.2016

"I write to bring to your personal attention that 21 fishermen in 3 traditional fishing boats from Tamil Nadu set out for fishing from the Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District on 27.04.2016 and have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy and taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka. They were engaged in fishing in their traditional waters of Palk Bay when the Sri Lankan Navy apprehended them.

Once again, I reiterate the Government of Tamil Nadu's stand that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question, as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

I would like to point out that 85 fishing boats and 13 Tamil fishermen are still languishing in Sri Lankan custody. The prolonged detention and disuse of the boats would have damaged them, thereby causing immeasurable loss of livelihood to the poor fishermen. I once again request the Government of India to secure the release of the fishing boats and restore them in a refurbished condition to the fishermen at the earliest.

May I request you to take immediate action to secure the release of 34 fishermen from Tamil Nadu and 88 fishing boats, including the 21 fishermen and 3 traditional fishing boats apprehended on 27.04.2016?"

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## ‘Act swiftly for release of fishermen held in Iran’

**D.O. letter dated 27.05.2016**

“I wish to bring to your kind notice the pathetic plight of five fishermen from Tamil Nadu who were arrested and detained by the Iranian Coast Guard. They were engaged in fishing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on contract basis under the sponsorship of a Saudi national, Thiru Ali Zhurohi.

These five fishermen from Kanniyakumari District of Tamil Nadu ventured for fishing in a mechanised fishing boat bearing registration No.11457 from Qatif fishing base of Saudi Arabia on 23.04.2016. During the course of their fishing operations they inadvertently strayed into Iranian waters and were arrested and detained by the Iranian Coast Guard on 24.04.2016. The above five Indian fishermen are lodged in Central jail, Dehloran, Iran.

I bring this matter to your notice seeking your immediate and personal intervention to instruct the Embassy of India in Tehran and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to take effective legal steps to secure the immediate release of these poor innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu".

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# Immediate release of fishermen, boats sought

**D.O. letter dated 31.05.2016**

"I write to you to bring to your direct personal attention the resumption of the practice of the Sri Lankan Navy of apprehension and arrest of innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu who peacefully pursue their livelihood in their traditional fishing waters. In the latest incident, immediately on completion of the fishing ban period, 7 Tamil Nadu fishermen along with their mechanised fishing boat who set out for fishing from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District on 30.05.2016, were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 31.05.2016, and taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan Government continues to infringe upon the traditional rights our fishermen have historically enjoyed to fish in the Palk Bay. The Sri Lankan Navy has escalated the frequency and magnitude of instances of abduction of our fishermen and the seizure of their boats and fishing equipment over the last two years. In

a related provocative move, the Sri Lankan Government is trying to rebuild St. Anthonys' Church on the disputed Katchatheevu Island without obtaining the consent and contribution of Tamil Nadu fishermen.

You are well aware that the position of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) itself is a matter sub-judice in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. I had challenged the constitutional validity of the Indo Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 in my personal capacity, and subsequently the Government of Tamil Nadu impleaded itself in this case.

The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats and fishing gear of our fishermen is causing great frustration amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. Without their livelihood base, these fishermen are in a state of despondency. I urge you to take up this issue with the Sri Lankan Government and ensure the immediate release of the precariously berthed boats which continue to suffer great damage.

I request you to take up the matter with the highest authorities in Sri Lanka and secure the immediate release of the 7 fishermen and 89 fishing boats, without any delay.

May I request you to kindly direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take immediate action in the matter?"

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## Chief Minister seeks PM’s speedy intervention for fishermen release

**D.O. letter dated 04.06.2016**

“I write to you once again to bring to your notice yet another incident of apprehension of 4 Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 02.06.2016. It has been reported that 4 Tamil Nadu fishermen along with their mechanised fishing boat from Kottaipattinam fishing base of Pudukottai District on 01.06.2016, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 02.06.2016 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

The Government of Tamil Nadu reiterates its stand that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India

in W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008. The Government of Tamil Nadu has also been subsequently impleaded in this case.

I have repeatedly brought to your kind attention, the Sri Lankan Government's inhumane and cruel strategy of delaying the release of the boats and fishing gear of our fishermen which is causing great loss of livelihood to our fishermen and their families. I am constrained to point out that despite my repeated requests, the seized boats and gear belonging to the fishermen of Tamil Nadu have not been released by the Sri Lankan authorities so far. I once again request that the fishing boats and gear of our fishermen should immediately be released and restored to them in a refurbished condition as long periods of disuse would have caused severe damage to them.

My Government has taken many steps towards diversification of fishing activities in Palk Bay so as to ensure better and alternative livelihood opportunities to the fishermen by providing subsidy assistance for purchasing deep sea tuna long liners etc. The comprehensive special package for deep sea fishing and infrastructure at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging which I had requested as part of the Memoranda presented to you on 03.06.2014 and 07.08.2015 must be urgently sanctioned.

I request you to immediately direct the concerned officials in the Ministry of External Affairs to take urgent action to secure the release of 11 fishermen and 90 fishing boats including the 4 fishermen and their mechanised fishing boat apprehended on 02.06.2016 without any delay.

May I request your immediate intervention in this matter?"

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## ‘Ensure that our fishermen pursue livelihood peacefully in their waters’

**D.O. letter dated 06.06.2016**

“This is to bring to your notice yet another incident in which four fishermen from Tamil Nadu have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy and their right to fishing in their traditional waters infringed upon. This is the third such incident within a week. It is reported that 4 fishermen in a mechanised fishing boat from Rameswaram fishing base in Ramanathapuram District were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 04.06.2016 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

You would recall that I have written to you on many occasions, bringing to your notice the repeated instances of abduction and apprehension of innocent Indian fishermen belonging to the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy while eking out their livelihood in their traditional fishing waters. I have been requesting the Government of India to mount a strong diplomatic

initiative to uphold the rights and interests of our Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu. In spite of my repeated appeals to ensure the safety and security of our innocent fishermen and to devise a permanent solution to this sensitive livelihood issue, the situation at sea remains precarious with the continued offensive acts of the Sri Lankan Navy.

The unconstitutional ceding of Katchatheevu by the agreements of 1974 and 1976 is central to this problem. The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the fishing boats, the main source of livelihood of the poor fishermen, is further aggravating the situation. At present, there are 90 fishing boats impounded and insecurely berthed in Sri Lanka and are undergoing severe deterioration.

I request you to urgently direct the Ministry of External Affairs to use diplomatic channels to ensure that our fishermen are allowed to peacefully pursue their livelihood in their traditional fishing waters. I also request your direct intervention to secure the immediate release of the 15 fishermen and 91 fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody, including the 4 fishermen and one mechanised fishing boat apprehended on 04.06.2016.

May I request immediate action in the matter?"

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# PM's intervention sought for immediate release of fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 10.06.2016

"This is to bring to your notice yet another incident in which six fishermen, in one mechanized fishing boat from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District, were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 09.06.2016 and taken to Thalaimannar.

It is highly disheartening to note that our fishermen are facing daily threats of harassment and abduction at the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy while fishing in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay.

I would like to remind you that 15 fishermen apprehended earlier this month are still languishing in Sri Lankan custody. 91 fishing boats are also in Sri Lankan custody at present. The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats while releasing the fishermen and thus throttling the livelihood of the fishermen is causing immense frustration amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. I urge

you to take this up with the highest authorities of the Sri Lankan Government and ensure the immediate release of our fishermen and their fishing boats.

The IMBL itself is a matter sub-judice in the Supreme Court of India wherein the Government of Tamil Nadu and I, in my personal capacity, have challenged the unconstitutional ceding of Katchatheevu through the 1974 and 1976 Agreements. The Government of Tamil Nadu strongly reiterates the need to restore the traditional rights of our fishermen by annulling the ill-advised Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 urgently.

I urge your personal intervention in this matter and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities in a concrete and decisive manner so as to secure the immediate release of our 21 fishermen and 92 fishing boats, including the 6 fishermen and their one mechanised fishing boat apprehended on 09.06.2016 at the earliest."

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## Lasting solution sought to livelihood problem of Tamil Nadu fishermen

### D.O. letter dated 17.06.2016

"I am constrained to again bring to your notice one more instance of apprehension of innocent Indian fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is reported that 3 fishermen in a mechanized fishing boat from Kottaipattinam fishing base in Pudukottai District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 15.06.2016 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan authorities adamantly refuse to recognize the traditional and historic rights of our Tamil Nadu fishermen to eke out their livelihood from fishing in the traditional waters of the Palk Bay. At the root of the problem are the ill-advised Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 which unconstitutionally ceded Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka. I have, in my personal capacity, challenged the legal validity of the Indo- Sri

Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 before the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India with the Government of Tamil Nadu subsequently impleading itself, and the case is still pending.

It is also painful to note that the Sri Lankan Government is now adopting a strategy of detaining boats for long periods of time. The prolonged detention and idling of fishing craft without care makes them unworthy for further sailing, thus causing immense loss and misery to the fishermen.

I again request the Government of India to initiate immediate efforts to find a permanent and pragmatic workable solution to this livelihood issue of our fishermen. I request your personal intervention in the matter and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to secure the immediate release of the 24 fishermen and 93 fishing boats, including the 3 fishermen and their one mechanised fishing boat apprehended on 15.06.2016 at the earliest."

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# Chief Minister seeks PM's personal intervention to free fishermen, boats

**D.O. letter dated 25.06.2016**

"This is to bring to your notice one more incident in which 5 fishermen in a motorised fishing boat, who set sail from Vilundamavadi fishing base of Nagapattinam District on 21.06.2016, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 23.06.2016.

The boat drifted ashore to Valvettithurai, Sri Lanka, due to an engine snag following which the 5 fishermen were arrested and remanded by the Sri Lankan Government and their boat detained. This appears to be an inhumane act of arresting fishermen in distress at sea.

There are already 24 fishermen and 93 fishing boats of the fishermen of Tamil Nadu in Sri Lankan custody. The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great frustration amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. I urge you to take this up with the highest authorities of the Sri Lankan Government and

ensure the immediate release of the precariously berthed boats.

Denying our fishermen the right to peaceful fishing in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay to which they have a historical claim is causing considerable angst amongst the fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu. The Government of Tamil Nadu strongly reiterates the need to restore the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen in the Palk Bay by annulling the Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976. The constitutional validity of these agreements has been challenged on very valid legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008 by me and the Government of Tamil Nadu has subsequently impleaded itself.

I once again call for your personal intervention to secure the release of 29 fishermen and 94 fishing boats including the 5 fishermen in the motorised fishing boat apprehended on 23.06.2016 at the earliest. May I request you to instruct the Ministry of External Affairs to take urgent steps to secure the immediate release of fishermen and their boats from Sri Lankan custody at the earliest? "

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## ‘Calibrated action needed to ensure livelihood of Tamil Nadu fishermen’

**D.O. letter dated 03.07.2016**

“This is to bring to your notice yet another incident in which five fishermen of Tamil Nadu have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is reported that 5 fishermen in a mechanised fishing boat who set sail for fishing from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 03.07.2016 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

The repeated instances of abduction and apprehension of innocent Indian fishermen belonging to the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu adjoining the Palk Bay, by the Sri Lankan Navy, while engaged in earning their meagre livelihood by fishing in their traditional fishing waters, is a matter of grave concern. I have repeatedly emphasized the importance of the Government of India undertaking a strong diplomatic offensive to uphold the rights and interests of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu.

The unconstitutional ceding of the Indian territory of Katchatheevu Island by the agreements of 1974 and 1976 have been challenged by me on valid legal grounds in the Supreme Court of India. Despite my repeated appeals to the Government of India to ensure that the traditional fishing rights of the Tamil Nadu fishermen are upheld through a permanent solution to this sensitive livelihood issue, the situation at sea remains precarious with the unabated offensive actions of the Sri Lankan navy.

The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the fishing boats, the sole and only source of livelihood of the poor fishermen,

is further aggravating the situation. At present 95 impounded fishing boats remain insecurely berthed in Sri Lanka and are sustaining severe damages.

I request that a calibrated set of actions is immediately initiated to ensure that our fishermen are allowed to pursue their livelihood with freedom in their traditional waters. I once again call for your immediate intervention to secure the immediate release of the 34 fishermen and 95 fishing boats currently in Sri Lankan custody, including the 5 fishermen and their mechanised fishing boat apprehended on 03.07.2016 without any delay".

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## Permanent solution sought for 'livelihood issue of our fishermen'

**D.O. letter dated 06.07.2016**

"I am constrained to write to you yet again to bring to your notice two more incidents of apprehension of innocent Indian fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is reported that 6 fishermen in their traditional fishing boat who set sail from Pamban fishing base in Ramanathapuram District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 04.07.2016 and taken to Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka. In yet another incident, 2 boats from Nagapattinam District with 17 fishermen were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 05.07.2016 and have been taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

The historic rights of our fishermen to fish in the traditional waters of the Palk Bay are being continuously denied and the root cause of the problem is the unconstitutional ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka under the Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976.

I had in my personal capacity challenged the legal validity of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreements and the Government of Tamil Nadu subsequently impleaded itself in this case.

It is the stand of the Government of Tamil Nadu that the International Maritime Boundary line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka cannot be treated as settled as the matter is sub-judice. I reiterate that only the retrieval of Katchatheevu will ensure the restoration of the peaceful pursuit of their traditional livelihood by our fishermen in the Palk Bay.

The long period of impoundment and disuse and the precarious berthing of the seized fishing craft render them unusable and greatly damage the only means of livelihood of our poor fishermen. I request the Government of India to impress upon the Sri Lankan Government to immediately release the 95 fishing boats of our fishermen already in custody.

I once again seek your urgent directions to the Ministry of External Affairs to initiate earnest efforts to find a permanent and pragmatic solution to this livelihood issue of our fishermen. I request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to secure the immediate release of our 57 fishermen and 98 fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody, including the 23 fishermen and their 3 fishing boats apprehended on 04.07.2016 and 05.07.2016."

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## Chief Minister seeks PM's personal intervention for release of fishermen

### D.O. letter dated 08.07.2016

"I write to strongly reiterate my earlier exhortations for an early, permanent and peaceful solution to the livelihood issue affecting lakhs of fishermen from Tamil Nadu living along the coast bordering the Palk Bay. The apprehension, arrest, and incarceration of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy continues unabated and in the latest instance, 16 Indian fishermen in 3 mechanised fishing boats from Rameswaram fishing base in Ramanathapuram District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 7.7.2016 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka. With this the total number of fishermen in Sri Lankan custody has reached 73.

The unconstitutional ceding of the Indian territory of Katchatheevu Island by the agreements of 1974 and 1976 has been challenged by me on valid legal grounds in the Supreme Court of India. The Government of Tamil Nadu subsequently impleaded itself in this case. The stand of

the Government of Tamil Nadu is that the International Maritime Boundary line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka cannot be treated as settled by the Government of India as the matter is sub-judice. I reiterate that only the retrieval of Katchatheevu will restore to our fishermen the right to peacefully earn their livelihood by fishing in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay and thereby permanently resolve this vexatious issue.

What is particularly distressing is that the Sri Lankan authorities have been unrelenting in their strategy of not releasing the fishing boats and gear and thereby greatly impairing the meagre livelihood of our poor fishermen. The prolonged disuse of the fishing craft and gear and lack of care and maintenance will make them unusable and unseaworthy, compounding the financial losses of the poor fishermen and reducing them to economic ruin. Hence, I strongly urge the Government of India to secure the release, at the earliest, of the fishing boats and their return in a refurbished condition to our fishermen.

I have repeatedly emphasized the importance of the Government of India undertaking a strong diplomatic offensive to uphold the rights and interests of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu. I once again seek your urgent directions to the Ministry of External Affairs to initiate measures to find a permanent solution to this livelihood issue of our fishermen.

I also request your personal intervention to secure the immediate release of the 73 fishermen and 101 fishing boats, including the 16 fishermen and their 3 fishing boats apprehended on 07.07.2016, from Sri Lankan custody. I urge that there should be strong and decisive action by the Government of India in this matter and the present situation cannot be allowed to fester in this manner."

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## ‘Earnest efforts’ sought to halt apprehensions on high seas

### D.O. letter dated 16.07.2016

“The unabated spree of apprehensions of Tamil Nadu fishermen constrains me to write once again to bring to your notice an incident in which 4 Tamil Nadu fishermen, along with their motorised fishing boat, who set out for fishing from Pamban fishing base of Ramanathapuram District, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hour of 15.07.2016 and taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan Government continues to infringe upon the historically enjoyed rights of our fishermen to fish in the traditional waters of the Palk Bay. The Sri Lankan Navy has escalated the frequency and magnitude of incidents of abduction of our fishermen and seizure of boats and fishing equipment undeterred in recent days.

I once again reiterate that the position of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) itself is a matter which

is sub-judice in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. I have challenged the constitutional validity of the ceding of Katchatheevu through the Indo Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 in my personal capacity, and subsequently the Government of Tamil Nadu impleaded itself in this case.

The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great frustration amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. Without their livelihood base, these fishermen are in a state of despondency. I urge you to take up this matter with the highest authorities of the Sri Lankan Government through our High Commission in Sri Lanka and ensure the immediate release of the precariously berthed boats which continue to suffer great damage.

I request your urgent directions to the Ministry of External Affairs to initiate earnest efforts to take up this matter with the concerned authorities in Sri Lanka and bring an immediate halt to the apprehensions at high seas and secure the immediate release of our 77 fishermen and their 102 fishing boats, including the 4 fishermen and their one motorised fishing boat apprehended on 15.07.2016, without any delay.

May I request you to kindly issue directions to the Ministry of External Affairs immediately?"

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# PM requested to intervene as fishermen are held once again

## D.O. letter dated 10.08.2016

"I write to bring to your notice, yet another incident of apprehension of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy. Four fishermen in one mechanised fishing boat who set sail from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukkottai District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 08.08.2016 and taken to Kankesanthurai in Sri Lanka.

This most recent act of the Sri Lankan Navy has again created anxiety and unrest in the minds of our fishermen. A firm, clear, unequivocal and unambiguous message should be sent out by the Government of India to the Sri Lankan side to ensure that these apprehensions are stopped and the livelihood of the poor and innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu who are engaged in fishing in their traditional waters is protected.

I once again reiterate that retrieving the Katchatheevu islet and abrogation of the 1974 and 1976 agreements alone can restore the traditional fishing grounds of the Palk Bay to the Tamil Nadu fishermen. The ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by me in the Supreme Court of India, in my personal capacity and the Government of Tamil Nadu subsequently impleaded itself in this case.

The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great frustration amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. Without their livelihood base, these fishermen are in a state of despondency. I urge you to take this up with the highest authorities of the Sri Lankan Government and ensure the immediate release of the precariously berthed boats which continue to suffer great damage.

You are also aware that my Government has taken a number of steps to minimize the pressure on the marine ecosystem. The comprehensive special package for deep sea fishing and infrastructure at a cost of Rs.1,520 crore and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore per annum for maintenance dredging which I had requested as part of the Memoranda presented to you on 03.06.2014, 07.08.2015 and 14.06.2016 must be urgently sanctioned.

I reiterate that the issue of apprehension of our fishermen and release of their boats must be taken up at

the highest diplomatic level and the Government of India must take necessary steps to ensure the safety and security of our fishermen. I request your personal intervention to secure the release of the 4 fishermen and 103 fishing boats currently in Sri Lankan custody at the earliest."

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# PM's personal intervention sought in Tamil Nadu fishermen's livelihood issue

## D.O. letter dated 11.12.2016

"I write to bring to your kind attention an incident of an unprovoked attack on Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu while fishing in their traditional waters of Palk Bay. Two mechanised fishing boats bearing registration numbers IND/TN/08/MM/125 and IND/TN/06/MM/542 with eight fishermen on board set out for fishing from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukottai District on 10.12.2016. While fishing in their traditional waters, these fishermen came under attack of the Sri Lankan Navy at about 2.30 pm on the same day. It is reported that the Sri Lankan Navy personnel boarded the fishing boats and brutally attacked the poor fishermen. The frightened fishermen, terrorized by the unprovoked and brutal attack of the Sri Lankan Navy, returned to shore immediately. On their return, they were treated at a local Hospital at Manamelkudi, Pudukottai.

In spite of the several steps taken by the Government of Tamil Nadu under the leadership of our revered leader

Puratchi Thalaivi Amma to find a permanent pragmatic solution to this sensitive livelihood issue, the situation at sea remains precarious because of the belligerent actions of the Sri Lankan Navy. The Sri Lankan Navy continues to unleash its reign of terror on our fishermen in the Palk Bay, where these fishermen have earned their meagre livelihood from time immemorial. The inhuman and barbaric acts of the Sri Lankan Navy continue unabated in spite of several rounds of talks and meetings between Government of Sri Lanka and the Government of India wherein it was assured that force would not be used against bonafide Indian fishermen.

Our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had repeatedly pointed out that the retrieval of Katchatheevu Island and the abrogation of the 1974 agreement alone can restore the traditional fishing grounds of the Palk Bay to the Tamil Nadu fishermen. The stand of the Government of Tamil Nadu is that the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka cannot be treated as settled by the Government of India. The ceding of Katchatheevu has been challenged on valid and legal grounds by our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma in the Supreme Court of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu has subsequently impleaded itself in the case.

I also wish to bring to your kind attention that as on date there are 15 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu languishing

in Sri Lankan custody, including 11 fishermen who were apprehended on 19.11.2016. I request you to direct urgent diplomatic level intervention by the Government of India to enable the early release of the fishermen in Sri Lankan custody.

Further, the unrelenting Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great frustration amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. Without the basic means of earning their livelihood, these fishermen are in a state of despondency. I urge you to take this up with the highest authorities of the Sri Lankan Government and ensure the immediate release of the precariously berthed 107 boats which continue to suffer great damage.

I request you to intervene personally in this sensitive livelihood issue of our fishermen and use diplomatic channels to curb the violent actions of the Sri Lankan Navy on innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu. It is very important that the Government of India acts decisively to ensure that our fishermen can pursue their livelihood with freedom and peace of mind in their traditional waters of Palk Bay. I also request the Government of India to secure the release of 15 fishermen and 107 fishing boats without any delay.”

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# ‘Reverse trend of attacks on fishermen with firm message to Sri Lanka’

## D.O. letter dated 20.12.2016

“I am constrained to bring to your notice yet another incident of apprehension of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is reported that 7 fishermen in two mechanised fishing boats who set sail from Kottaipattinam fishing base of Pudukottai District of Tamil Nadu, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 20.12.2016. The boats and fishermen have been reportedly taken to Karainagar in Sri Lanka and remanded to custody.

It is unfortunate that the apprehension of fishermen of Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy, while pursuing their traditional avocation of fishing, continues unabated despite Indo-Sri Lankan fishermen level talks and Inter-Ministerial talks being held from time to time.

The right to life and livelihood of the fishermen of the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu, who carry on fishing in the traditional waters of the Palk Bay is being continuously infringed upon by the Sri Lankan Navy's recurrent actions of apprehension, attack and harassment of innocent fishermen. It is the consistent stand of the Government of Tamil Nadu that a permanent solution to this vexatious problem faced by our fishermen will be possible only by restoring India's sovereignty over Katchatheevu thereby securing their right to fish in their traditional waters. The position of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) itself is a matter which is sub-judice in the Supreme Court of India.

A firm, clear and unambiguous message should be sent out by the Government of India to the Sri Lankan side to ensure that this trend needs to be reversed and that the Government of India is firmly committed to protect the livelihood of the poor and innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu engaged in fishing in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay.

There are now 109 boats including the two boats apprehended today that are yet to be released by the Sri Lankan side. The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great frustration amongst

the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. Without their livelihood base, these fishermen are in a state of despondency.

I urge your personal intervention in this matter and request you to kindly direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri-Lankan authorities so as to secure the immediate release of the 22 fishermen and 109 boats, including the fishermen and boats apprehended on 20.12.2016."

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# Chief Minister raises further attacks on Tamil Nadu fishermen with PM

## D.O. letter dated 21.12.2016

"I write with a deep sense of anguish about another three incidents of apprehension of fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is reported that 5 fishermen in a mechanized fishing boat and 7 fishermen in a motorized country craft, who ventured into the sea for fishing from the Pamban fishing base of Ramanathapuram District were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 21.12.2016. Further, 2 mechanized fishing boats of Rameswaram and Mandapam fishing bases with 12 fishermen on board and one mechanized fishing boat from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukottai District with 5 fishermen on board were apprehended in the evening of 21.12.2016 by the Sri Lankan Navy. These incidents have occurred just a day after the apprehension of 7 fishermen and their two boats on 20.12.2016. The fishermen have been reportedly taken to Mannar and Kankesanthurai in Sri Lanka and remanded to custody.

The recurrent instances of attacks upon and abduction of, our fishermen on the high seas in the Palk Bay should be stopped immediately. Our fishermen should be allowed to pursue their peaceful avocation of fishing in their traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay. It is the consistent stand of the Government of Tamil Nadu that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by our revered Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma, in her personal capacity, in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008. Subsequently, the Government of Tamil Nadu has also impleaded itself in this case.

This livelihood issue of thousands of our fisherfolk needs your personal intervention. The alarmingly increasing frequency of apprehension of our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy is a matter of utmost concern for my Government. An immediate intervention at the highest level is sought to resolve this longstanding issue.

I request the Government of India to act decisively in the light of the sensitive nature of this issue. I also request you to secure the immediate release of 51 fishermen and 114 fishing boats, including the 29 fishermen and their 5 fishing boats apprehended on 21.12.2016 without any delay."

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## ‘Ensure seized boats are returned immediately in refurbished condition’

**D.O. letter dated 02.01.2017**

“I write with a sense of deep anguish at the very unfortunate and needlessly provocative remarks of the Sri Lankan Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development, Mr. Mahinda Amaraweera, reported in a section of the media, indicating that the fishing boats and gear of Indian fishermen of Tamil Nadu which are in the custody of the Sri Lankan authorities, would be taken over and made the property of the Government of Sri Lanka. I understand that a similar statement has also been made by the Sri Lankan Northern Province Minister for Fisheries and Rural Development, Mr. Balasubramaniam Deniswaran, which has been extensively reported in Tamil Nadu’s regional media.

This is an unfortunate development coming at a time when the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group on Fisheries met in New Delhi on 31.12.2016, and is due to meet again on the sidelines of the Ministerial meeting

at Colombo on 02.01.2017. The above statements are especially alarming when Indian fishermen, have come forward with an accommodative frame of mind, to find a resolution to this long pending sensitive livelihood issue.

Our revered leader, the late Hon'ble Chief Minister Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had repeatedly brought to your personal attention our concerns over the Sri Lankan Government's strategy of delaying the release of the boats and fishing gear of our fishermen which caused great loss of livelihood to our fishermen and their families. As you aware, there are as on date 114 fishing boats of Tamil Nadu fishermen in Sri Lankan custody and our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had also repeatedly urged the Government of India to prevail upon the Government of Sri Lanka to release all the apprehended boats which are in the custody of Sri Lankan authorities. The Government of Tamil Nadu has also raised the issue of release of fishing boats in the just concluded Joint Working Group Meeting on 31st December, 2016, and this issue is also to be discussed during the Ministerial level meeting scheduled in Colombo on 02.01.2017.

I also wish to point out that that 80 fishing boats of fishermen from Tamil Nadu apprehended by Sri Lankan Navy during the year 2014 were released only in 2015. Out of these 80 boats, apart from the 2 boats which had sunk at the time of apprehension, 16 boats are damaged beyond salvage, 31 sustained major damages, and 33

boats sustained minor damages. This has inflicted heavy financial losses on the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. Our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had repeatedly urged that the fishing boats and gear of our fishermen should be restored to them in a refurbished condition.

At this juncture, media reports both in Sri Lankan and Tamil media, quoting the Sri Lankan Minister for Fisheries, and the Sri Lankan Northern Province Minister for Fisheries & Rural Development that the Government of Sri Lanka will transfer the ownership of the fishing boats and gear of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu to the custody of the Sri Lankan authorities, have caused great disquiet and anguish amongst the fishing community in Tamil Nadu. This is not the first time that such reports are appearing and on an earlier occasion on 01.04.2016,a section of Sri Lankan media quoted the Sri Lankan Minister for Fisheries, Mr. Mahinda Amaraweera saying that the Government of Sri Lanka had approached the competent Courts for permission to give away the fishing boats and gear of Tamil Nadu fishermen to the fishermen of Northern Sri Lanka and to scrap and auction the boats which are unusable.

Such unfortunate and provocative statements are clearly veiled threats to intimidate our fishermen from exercising their traditional fishing rights in the Palk Bay which they have done for centuries. Such statements appear to mock the diplomatic efforts being undertaken by the Government

of India to sort out the sensitive issue. I strongly urge the Government of India to register its disapproval of such remarks in the strongest possible terms at the appropriate level. Such statements just before the Inter Ministerial level talks of the two countries will certainly vitiate the atmosphere before the talks.

The Government of Tamil Nadu's case seeking abrogation of the 1974 Indo-Sri Lankan agreement that ceded the islet Katchatheevu along with the potential traditional fishing grounds of our fishermen to Sri Lanka is already sub-judice before the Supreme Court of India.

In this context, I urge the Government of India to take steps to ensure that the boats and fishing gear of Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan custody are returned to the Tamil Nadu fishermen in a refurbished condition at the earliest. I also request you to ensure that immediate action is taken to secure the release of the 51 Indian fishermen who continue to languish in Sri Lankan custody.

I kindly request your immediate intervention in this matter."

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# Tamil Nadu seeks reversal of trend of attacks on fishermen by Sri Lanka

## D.O. letter dated 05.01.2017

This is to bring to your notice, an incident of apprehension of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is reported that, 10 fishermen in two mechanised fishing boats who set sail from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukottai District of Tamil Nadu, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the evening hours of 04.01.2017. The fishermen have been remanded to custody.

It is unfortunate that this incident has taken place at a time when our fishermen were hopeful that a pragmatic and permanent solution to this issue would emerge from the Ministerial level meeting which took place at Colombo on 02.01.2017. A firm, clear, unequivocal and unambiguous message should be sent out by the Government of India to the Sri Lankan side to ensure that these trends are reversed and thereby clearly signal that the Government of India is firmly committed to protect the livelihood of the poor and

innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu who are engaged in their traditional occupation and fishing in their traditional waters.

The Government of Tamil Nadu strongly reiterates the need to restore the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen in the Palk Bay by annulling the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of 1974 as the constitutional validity of this agreement has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008 by our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma.

There are as on date 116 boats that are yet to be released and remain precariously perched on the Sri Lankan shores. The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great frustration amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. Without their livelihood base, these fishermen are in a state of despondency. Though the Government of Sri Lanka agreed to consider the release of the boats, no decision has been taken in this regard. I request the Government of India to take up this serious issue with the highest authorities of the Sri Lankan Government and ensure the immediate release of the boats which continue to suffer great damage.

I had in the Memorandum presented to you on 19.12.2016, reiterated the request of our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma for sanction of a financial package of Rs.1,650 crore including a recurring grant of

Rs.10 crore which would go a long way in improving the socio-economic status of the fishermen from the coastal districts of Palk Bay in Tamil Nadu. It is requested that the concerned Ministries may suitably be directed to sanction the package at the earliest.

The Government of Tamil Nadu strongly urges that such incidents of apprehension of our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy be taken up strongly at the highest diplomatic level and the Government of India should take necessary steps to ensure the safety and security of our fishermen. The Government of India is also requested to secure the immediate release of 61 fishermen and 116 fishing boats including the 10 fishermen and their two mechanized fishing boats apprehended on 04.01.2017 without any delay.

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## Early sanction for Rs.1,650 crore deep sea fishing package sought

### D.O. letter dated 08.01.2017

“At the outset I thank you for responding to the repeated requests made by me on behalf of the Government of Tamil Nadu and ensuring that the Government of India took concerted efforts to secure the release of 51 Tamil Nadu fishermen in Sri Lankan custody. Unfortunately, even before the sense of relief following the release of the 51 fishermen could fully set in and the released fishermen reached our shores, the Sri Lankan navy has yet again resorted to its harsh and unjust tactic of apprehending Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu while peacefully pursuing their avocation in the traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay.

It is reported that, in two separate incidents on 08.01.2017, 6 fishermen in one mechanised fishing boat who set sail from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukottai District and4 fishermen in another mechanised fishing boat who set sail from Rameswaram fishing base

of Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 08.01.2017. The boats and fishermen have been reportedly taken to Kankesanthurai and Thalaimannar in Sri Lanka.

The Government of Tamil Nadu is extremely concerned about the continuing frequent apprehension and detention of our fishermen. As you are aware, in 2016 itself 290 Tamil Nadu fishermen along with their 53 fishing boats were apprehended in 39 incidents. Subsequently all 290 fishermen were released due to the unstinted efforts of our revered leader the late Hon'ble Chief Minister Puratchi Thalaivi Amma.

Even though the fishermen apprehended earlier have been released, their boats and fishing gear, which represent the only means of livelihood of the poor fishermen are still impounded by the Sri Lankan authorities. Our beloved leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had repeatedly pointed out the Sri Lankan strategy of keeping the fishing boats in custody thereby depriving the poor fishermen and their families of their only source of meager livelihood, was part of a sinister strategy to immiserate our fisherman community. This is fuelling despondency and great unrest amongst the fishermen. The 118 boats of Tamil Nadu fishermen in Sri Lankan custody are deteriorating due to lack of maintenance on a daily basis. These boats have remained exposed to the elements over two North East Monsoon seasons and continue to suffer further damage

and deterioration. That is why our Revered Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had repeatedly called upon Government of India to secure the release of the fishing boats and ensure their return to the fishermen in a refurbished condition.

I wish to reiterate that the International Maritime Boundary line between India and Sri Lanka in the Palk Bay itself is a matter that is sub judice. The constitutional validity of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of 1974 has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008 by our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma in her personal capacity. The Government of Tamil Nadu subsequently impleaded itself in this case.

An early sanction of Rs.1,650 crore for the Deep sea fishing and infrastructure package that our revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had sought and which I had reiterated in my memorandum presented to you on 19.12.2016, would go a long way in the efforts to promote deep sea fishing and to improve the socio economic status of our fishermen in the Palk Bay.

I also request you to kindly direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take expeditious steps to secure the release of 20 fishermen and 118 fishing boats including the 10 fishermen and their two mechanized fishing boats apprehended on 08.01.2017 without any delay."

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## Yet another arrest of our fishermen, another missive to Prime Minister

### D.O. letter dated 02.02.2017

“This is to bring to your notice, an incident of apprehension of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu. It is reported that 5 fishermen in a mechanised fishing boat who set sail from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukottai District of Tamil Nadu, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 02.02.2017. The fishermen have been taken to Kankesanthurai in Sri Lanka and remanded.

The Sri Lankan authorities continue to infringe upon the historical rights enjoyed by our fishermen to fish in their traditional waters of Palk Bay. The Government of Tamil Nadu reiterates that the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) itself is a matter which is sub-judice before the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India. Our revered leader PuratchiThalaiviAmma had challenged the

constitutional validity of the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreements of 1974 and 1976 in her personal capacity, and subsequently the Government of Tamil Nadu impleaded itself in this case.

The Sri Lankan authorities have not released any of the fishing boats that were apprehended by them since February 2015. With their sole means livelihood taken away, the Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu are in a despondent state. Presently there are 119 boats in Sri Lankan custody which are precariously berthed on the Sri Lankan shore. Though the Government of Sri Lanka committed to consider the release of the boats in the Ministerial level meeting held at Colombo, Sri Lanka on 02.01.2017, no action has been taken as yet in this regard. I request the Government of India to take up this issue with the authorities of the Sri Lankan Government and ensure the immediate release of the precariously berthed boats and restore them in a refurbished condition to the fishermen for their immediate use.

I also request you to sanction the Comprehensive Special package of Rs.1,650 crore including a recurring grant of Rs.10 crore, as sought by my Revered Leader PuratchiThalaiviAmma and reiterated in the Memorandum I had presented to you on 19.12.2016. This would go a

long way in bringing about a permanent solution to this festering issue plaguing the lives of fishermen from the coastal Districts of Palk Bay in Tamil Nadu.

I again request you to kindly instruct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the issue effectively with Sri Lanka and to secure the release of 25 fishermen and 119 fishing boats including the 5 fishermen and their mechanized fishing boat apprehended on 02.02.2017 without any delay."

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# Delhi urged to act decisively to end travails of fishermen

## D.O. letter dated 07.02.2017

"I write to bring to your notice yet another incident of apprehension of 10 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy on 07.02.2017. It has been reported that7 fishermen onboard a mechanised fishing boat set out for fishing from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District. The boat's engine reportedly developed a technical snag and the boat was drifting. Three fishermen from another fishing boat boarded the stricken boat to rectify the engine defect, when all ten of them were apprehended by theSri Lankan Navy on 07.02.2017 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

This is an instance where our fishermen on a boat in distress have been apprehended. This is an unacceptable and inhumane act.  Under the internationally accepted laws of the sea, such vessels in distress have to be treated in a humanitarian fashion. I reiterate the Government

ofTamil Nadu’s consistent stand that our fishermen should be allowed to pursue their peaceful avocation of fishing in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay. It is also the consistent stand of the Government of Tamil Nadu that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976 agreements have been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by our revered leader PuratchiThalaiviAmma, in her personal capacity, in the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India in W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008 and subsequently, the Government of Tamil Nadu has also impleaded itself in this case.

I take this opportunity to remind you that there are already 119 fishing boats belonging to Tami Nadu fishermen in Sri Lankan custody. Long periods of disuse and the onslaught of the monsoon during the last two years would have inflicted severe damages to the boats and equipment. The poor fishermen who are currently suffering a temporary loss of livelihood, would now be subjected to a huge permanent livelihood loss due to the damage to the fishing boats.I reiterate my request that their only means of livelihood, the boats, are released and restored in a refurbished condition by the Government of India at the earliest.

I request the Government of India to act decisively in light of the sensitive nature of this issue and put in place

appropriate mechanisms to bring about an end to the sufferings of our fishermen. I also request you to secure the immediate release of 35 fishermen and 120 fishing boats. In particular, the 10 fishermen on board the mechanised fishing boat in distress apprehended on 07.02.2017 must be released without filing of any cases and going through a long windedlegal process, on humanitarian grounds."

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# Chief Minister seeks Rs.1,650 crore package for fishermen, pressure on Sri Lanka

## D.O. letter dated 05.03.2017

I write to bring to your immediate attention, a sharp escalation in the incidents of apprehension of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy. In three incidents which occurred on the 4th and 5th March, 2017, 32 fishermen and 5 fishing boats have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is reported that 8 fishermen in their mechanised fishing boat who set sail for fishing from Akkaraipettai fishing base of Nagapattinam District were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 04.03.2016 and taken to Trincomalee, Sri Lanka. In two other incidents, 15 fishermen in two mechanised fishing boats from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District and 9 fishermen in two mechanised fishing boats from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukottai District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the

early hours of 05.03.2016 and taken to Thalaimannar and Kankesanthurai respectively in Sri Lanka.

This sharp escalation in harassment and apprehension of our fishermen, especially at a time when they are getting ready for the much awaited Katchatheevu festival, is causing considerable hardship and mental agony to poor innocent fishermen. It is reported that a fisherman onboard a fishing vessel about to be apprehended attempted to swallow broken glass out of fear and mental stress thereby endangering his life. This is a matter of grave concern and indicates the desperate situation in which Indian fishermen have been placed.

The Government of Tamil Nadu strongly reiterates the need to restore the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen in the Palk Bay by annulling the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of 1974 and 1976 as the constitutional validity of these agreements has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008. The Katchatheevu islet must be retrieved.

**We have been repeatedly requesting Government of India to sanction the comprehensive project for conversion of mechanized trawlers to deep sea long liners** and creation of other infrastructure which would

go a long way in resolving this sensitive livelihood issue. Based on Government of India's advice, the first batch of fishermen have also been trained in deep sea long liner fishing operations. But despite our repeated requests, neither has the package of Rs.1,650 crore been approved by Government of India **nor does there seem to be adequate pressure built up on Sri Lanka to desist from day to day harassment and arrest of our fishermen as they go about peaceably pursuing their traditional occupation of fishing in the waters in which they have enjoyed the customary rights to fish for several centuries. Tamil Nadu's fishermen appear to have been left at the total mercy of the Sri Lankan Navy which picks them up at random, incarcerates them for months together and fails to return their boats for years together despite commitments made in the talks which take place from time to time. There are a number of examples at the international level, including in South-East Asia, of countries with close maritime boundaries arriving at workable diplomatic arrangements in which both sides continue to fish without any harassment and interference. There is no reason why a similar arrangement cannot be put in place between India and Sri Lanka**.

Presently there are 128 fishing boats under Sri Lankan custody. The prolonged detention and disuse of these boats would have caused irrevocable damages to them leading to huge livelihood losses to the poor fishermen. I request you to immediately direct the concerned officials in the ministry of External Affairs to take concrete action through diplomatic channels to secure the immediate release of 85 fishermen and 128 fishing boats including the 32 fishermen and their 5 mechanised fishing boats apprehended on 04.03.2017 and 05.03.2017.

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